THE SECRET
OF THE
KATHA UPANISHAD

SWAMI KRISHNANANDA
The Divine Life Society
Sivananda Ashram, Rishikesh, India
Website: www.swami-krishnananda.org

ABOUT THIS EDITION

Though this eBook edition is designed primarily for digital readers and computers, it works well for print too. Page size dimensions are 5.5" x 8.5", or half a regular size sheet, and can be printed for personal, non-commercial use: two pages to one side of a sheet by adjusting your printer settings.

CONTENTS

PREFACE

The contents of the present book form the theme of the discourses which the Swamiji delivered for seven days during the Sadhana Week held at the Headquarters of the Divine Life Society, in the year 1973, before an audience of seekers of varied endowments and differing capacities on the path of spiritual practice. Hence, the lectures bear, naturally, an informal and personal touch of the teaching style, and this also explains the conversational accent maintained throughout, rather than a stricter form of expression usually associated with a deliberately written text.

The First Discourse starts with the present state of human perception and understanding in its empirical set-up; and explains the exoteric sacrifice (*yajna*) of Sage Vajasravasa to gain celestial ends; the query of Nachiketas; the meeting of Nachiketas and Yama, the Lord of Death; the three boons Nachiketas requested for; the temptations on the way; the persistence of the seeking soul; the distinction between the pleasant and the good in world-experience.

The Second Discourse explains the meaning of the pleasant and the ultimate good; the error involved in the desire for pleasant sensations of the body and the ego; the point concerning life here and hereafter; the pattern of world-experience as analysed; the spiritual import of the Upanishad teaching; the three stages of the mystic ascent of the soul outlined in the three boons offered to Nachiketas.

The Third Discourse points out the disciplines that are necessary for the pursuit of the Inner Life; the need for a spiritual guide; the nature of the higher knowledge; the seven

stages of meditation on Reality; the characteristics of the final goal of life.

The Fourth Discourse delineates the super-logical nature of Reality and its knowledge; the methods of yoga described through the analogy of the chariot of the human individuality in its relation to Reality, as the most practical part of the whole exercise of spiritual endeavour; the difficulties on the path; the subtleties of the Inner Way of the Spirit.

The Fifth Discourse investigates the intellectual processes in sensation, perception and cognition; the techniques of abstraction, concentration and meditation; the nature and experience of the merger of the individual in the Universal.

The Sixth Discourse expounds the glorious march of the soul along the path to the Absolute; the higher yoga of the Consciousness and its supernal attainments.

The Seventh Discourse clinches the mystery of life and death; and the methods of communion with the Supreme Being.

We are confident the students of philosophy and yoga will find, on a close study, that one rarely does come across a presentation to be placed in one's hands in which the fire of the soul burns so brightly through its pages.

—THE DIVINE LIFE SOCIETY
Shivanandanagar,
27th January, 1977

DISCOURSE NO. 1

ōm saha nāvavatu; saha nau bhunaktu;
saha viryam karavāvahai;
tejasvi nāvadhitamastu;
mā vidvishāvahai;
ōm Sāntih; Sāntih; Sāntih

Om! May He protect us both, (the teacher and the taught). May He cause us both to enjoy protection. May we both exert to find out the true meaning of the scriptures. May we never quarrel with each other. Let there be threefold Peace. Om. Peace! Peace! Peace!

It is the wish of several seekers who have come to participate in the Sadhana Week this year that during this holy occasion a concise presentation be made of the principles expounded in the great Vedic scripture, known as the Katha Upanishad. The purpose of so many *sadhakas* coming from long distances to this sacred abode at the foot of the Himalayas is obvious, viz. to gain a knowledge of the secret of life and gain also an access into the mysteries in which our life seems to be involved. The aim and mission of your visit to this sacred abode is naturally, as it ought to be, the revelation or the unfoldment of the entanglement of your personality, the involvements of your life, and to return with a newer type of enlightenment about that which you *are,* and that which involves you or in which you are involved.

Our life itself is the subject of study in the Katha Upanishad. Our life is a beautiful pattern of various threadwork woven dexterously by an expert Maker of all things, such that one cannot easily or intelligibly

comprehend how it is made or why it is made. We often, as human beings, take life for granted, as if it is an open book before us. We regard our life as a clear presentation like daylight and go headlong along the business of our daily activities under the impression that things are perfectly perspicuous and we have simply to act on the thought that occurs to our mind. This is an unfortunate assumption on the part of the human being. The cloth of life is spread before us, but it is not a flat surface as we imagine it to be.

In ancient times, it is said, most people imagined the world or the earth to be a flat surface; the sun rose and the sun set, illumining a perfectly flat surface of the earth, not knowing that it was round like a ball or something like that. It was also thought that the sun revolved round the earth; the sun was smaller than the size of the earth, not knowing that the revolution of the planetary system is a highly complicated involvement of powers and forces not easily reducible either merely to the sun or the planets as the earth. Today astronomy, the science of the existence and the operation of the planets and the stellar system, is known to be a highly complicated structure of forces rather than of things. Likewise we, with a crass perception of visible objects, mistaking objects seen with our senses for what they appear to be, rush like fools where even angels fear to tread. The consequence is that we are caught in the grip of unknown powers and forces. As monkeys are caught with the help of rope-nets spread to divert them into a mistaken idea of food being spread for them for their maintenance, likewise, the Maker of things seems to have spread out before us a pattern we call the world which we mistake for a

heaven of enjoyment for our senses; but when we rush into it we are caught, and then it would be too late for us to repent.

Everyone has been caught in this network of things called the world, right from creation up to the present day, and we have no reason to believe that the future generation will not be so caught. The pattern of life is not merely a location of objects for our enjoyment, for our likes and dislikes. The pattern of existence is a tremendously well thought-out involvement, externally as well as internally. The more we probe into the mystery and the structure of this involvement of the world, the more we begin to admire the wisdom of the Maker of things. It is not a simple structure. It is not a small ball of earth we call the planet on which we merely live like ants crawling on the surface of a ball. The world, our life, is more subtle and more involved in various ways than our intelligence can permit us to understand.

This mystery is the subject of the Katha Upanishad, which is generally defined as the mystery of death and the mystery of life. Well! Both mean one and the same thing if we understand them carefully. Life and death are identical. They are two aspects of one and the same event that takes place. This mystery of life, or the mystery of death as you would like to call it, is the secret of the Katha Upanishad; and side by side it is also a revelation of the mystery of the whole of existence, the mystery of you, the mystery of me and the mystery of everyone else, the mystery of your deeds, the mystery of the reactions of your actions, the

mystery of the consequences of what you do and suffer and enjoy, the mystery of God Himself.

We shall, during these few days before us, try to have a quintessential comprehension of this very interesting Upanishad—'Upanishad' which means the secret knowledge or the wisdom of life—and try to be blessed in our souls that our speaking as well as listening becomes a contemplation of a particular form, a meditation, veritably, by which I pray and I wish that our souls may be lifted up into a higher knowledge and experience.

The Katha Upanishad is one of the esoteric appendices to a section of the Vedas known as the Brahmanas. A particular Veda has a particular Brahmana and it has a lso a concluding esoteric exposition known as the Upanishad. The Katha Upanishad is such an esoteric, mystical, spiritual exposition appended to a Brahmana of the Krishna- Yajur-Veda. This Upanishad has within it implanted the wisdom of the entire life of man woven into a story of a great seeker of Reality we know as Nachiketas. This is the story of a great aspirant called Nachiketas; how this young lad aspired for the highest Reality of life and got an access into it through the working of mysterious forces.

The story that is the background of this exposition of the Upanishad is something like this—to give you in outline. There was a sage called Vajasravasa, known also as Gautama. He performed a *yajna* or a sacrifice called Vishvajit, a *yajna* or a sacrifice by which he aspired to enter the heaven of the gods. This sacrifice was of a very peculiar nature which demanded of the performer that he gave in charity everything that he possessed, dear and near. This

Vishvajit sacrifice known as the *sarvavedasa yajna* was performed by Gautama or Vajasravasa, the sage. In this *yajna*, through which performance he aspired to enjoy the pleasures of the heaven of the gods, he gave in charity as philanthropy everything that he possessed. All his belongings were given in charity—everything, whatever be the value of that possession—because that was the requisition of the *yajna*. Everything was given, and given, and given, nothing was left. Every day he began to give in charity all his possessions. This great sage known as Vajasravasa had also a son, perhaps the only son, known as Nachiketas. This unlettered boy, perhaps, untutored, simple, unsophisticated, observed this wonderful ritualistic performance of the Vishvajit sacrifice by his father, went on seeing everything being given—'all things are going'. All the wealth of the sage was being given. Those days cattle were regarded as a great wealth. The cattle wealth was held to be real wealth. All the multitude of the cattle belonging to the sage were given in charity, but unfortunate it was to the sensitive mind of the poor lad Nachiketas, he began to observe that these cattle were famished. They were only skeletons. Such cows were being given in charity—the cows which had drunk their water for the last time, which had eaten their grass for the last time, which were not going to calve again, which were without any strength in the body and were tottering with their poor legs. "Oh! Such charity is being given by my father!" The boy had no guts to speak but something urged him to speak forth his feelings. The sensitive lad spoke out his inner heart and called out to his father, "Father, you give everything that belongs to you. I

am your son. Perhaps I too belong to you. To whom do you propose to give me in charity? Because in this sacrifice you have to offer everything that belongs to you, and inasmuch as a son also seems to be a property of the father to some extent, evidently you think of giving me also. To whom do you want to give me?" The father had no idea of giving the son in charity to anyone. It was the last thing that he could imagine. The father paid a deaf ear to the words of the son. He said nothing. The second time the son asked the same question, "To whom do you want to give me, father?" He did not say anything. He was wroth. "Oh, this boy is butting in and impertinently putting me a question!" When a third time the boy asked the same question, the father responded, "To hell you go." This is what we generally say when we are irate. And he said, "To death I give you." He was angry. "Oh, I see! You give me to death." The boy went on thinking, "What has death to do with me, death presided over by Yama? I am being sent to him. What has Yama, the Lord of Death, to do with me? I do not understand."

This imprecation of the father upon the son, the curse that he threw upon him, evidently drew the soul out of the body of the boy. He died, apparently, if we read between the lines of the Upanishad. The boy went to the abode of Yama in search of that for which the father seems to have sent him. Yama is not there to be seen. The guest is standing outside the gates of the palace of the Lord of Death, Yama, but the master of the house is absent. Somewhere he has gone. No one knows what has happened to him or where he has gone. One day passes, one night passes, the second day and night passes, the third day and night passes. The boy is

standing there without water, without food. Nothing can be worse for a man than for a guest to stand starving at his gate. It is said that if a guest starves at the gates of a householder, that would be a veritable curse upon the householder. All his virtues will be withdrawn by the guest who is standing there starving.

Yama returns on the expiry of the third day. He hears that a mortal has come in search of him for some purpose and has been starving for three nights and three days. "Oh, what a pity!" says Yama, and rushes outside. "Oh, great sage! What service can I do for you? You have been standing here for three days. Have you eaten anything for three days? What have you eaten on the first day, what have you eaten on the second day, what have you eaten on the third day, my dear child?" "I ate your offspring on the first day." "What did you eat on the second day?" "All your cattle and wealth I ate." "What did you eat on the third day?" "All the good works that you have done." "Oh! Horrible! This is awful." Yama immediately brought the sacred waters from inside, the *purna-kumbha* that is offered to the honoured guest, washed the feet of the guest and made him seated. "Please excuse me for my absence for these three days and nights. May I know the purpose of your visit? May I be of any service to you? You have starved for three days. You can ask from me three boons. Three boons I am ready to bestow upon you, my dear child, as a recompense for the pain that I inflicted upon you inadvertently for three days and nights, when I made you starve at my gates."

“All right! You want me to choose one boon. When I return to the world, may my father recognise me without any anger upon me.” “Yes, granted!” said Yama. “When you return to the world, the father will recognise you and will receive you with affection and not with ire or wrath.” “Ask for another boon.” “Tell me the mystery of that Universal Fire out of which the whole world has been created.” “Yes, granted!”—and an elaborate performance of the sacrifice of the Universal Fire called the Vaishvanara was expounded. “Now my dear child, one more boon is left. You can ask for the third boon also.” “Ah! Now there is one thing. May I ask you? They say there is a soul, they say there is no soul. Some say it is, some say it is not. Some say it is born, some say it dies. Some say it is not born, some say it does not die. What happens to it, if it is, when it goes to the beyond?” “Child, do not ask this question! Ask for anything else. The longest life possible, the greatest pleasures conceivable, rulership of all the three worlds—whatever you want, here they are. Do not put this question. Don’t ask me about soul and all that; whether it is, whether it is not, what happens, and all that. You please keep quiet. Everything that is available, which is not available even to the gods, is presented to you now. Pleasures which the human being cannot even dream of are at your disposal by my grace. Delights of the celestials living in the seven heavens above are at your disposal. You can live unaffected by disease, old age and fatigue for as long as the universe lasts. You are the emperor of the three worlds. Are you satisfied? Don’t put this question.”

Nachiketas was made of a different stuff. He was not an ordinary boy. “Why should I not put this question? What is the trouble about it? You give me all these wonders that you have described to me but will not answer this simple question.” “Not even the gods have been able to answer this question. Not all the celestials put together in all the seven heavens can answer this question that you have put. Therefore, child, please do not pester me with this question. You keep quiet. I have made the mistake of telling you that you can ask for three boons, and now you are putting me in this embarrassing situation with a question which I cannot answer and I am not prepared to answer. You should not put this question. Take anything else. I am ready to give you. Please excuse me. Don’t bother me with this question.” “You say, O Lord, that even the gods cannot answer this question, which means to say, perhaps, that you know the answer to the question, and you want to turn me off with all the glamour of the perishable world, longest life, and all that. But what is longest life in this eternity? In this eternity of existence, what is the life of the whole universe? You say ‘the delight of all the gods’, but what is delight except itching of the senses? What are these pleasures but methods of wearing away the energy of the senses? You want to tempt me with these pleasures and will not answer me the question which you say even the gods cannot understand. You want to make me the ruler of this universe as long as it lasts, but what will happen to me when it does not last? When the universe dies and perishes, and it dissolves, what will happen to this ruler? He also goes! Take back all your pleasures, your offerings, your dance and the music and the

chariot and the cattle and the enjoyment and the long life and the rulership of the worlds. O Lord, take back all these gifts that you have offered to me! I am thankful; but Nachiketas will not budge from this place unless this question that he has asked the third time is answered."

This is the introduction to the Upanishad. Now, the Upanishad really begins. This great sacrifice of Vajasravasa Gautama for the purpose of enjoying the pleasures of heaven is the exoteric multitude of the deeds of humanity. The Upanishad is, as I mentioned to you, an exposition of the secret of the entire life of man, the secret of your life, the secret of my life and the secret of the life of every blessed thing. Vajasravasa represents humanity, as in the Bhagavadgita we say Arjuna represents mankind. The performance of this Vishvajit sacrifice by Vajasravasa Gautama is the performance of deeds by mankind as a whole. Man performs actions for the purpose of the enjoyment of the consequence of his actions. Why do you work from the morning till the evening in the various fields of your duties? To relieve yourself of the tensions of life and to enjoy the pleasures that are consequent upon the release of tension, and these pleasures to be enjoyed for as long a time as possible. You understand the purpose of your works in life. You work in this world because you want to come to a state of affairs when you need not work any more but will only enjoy the pleasures consequent upon your actions.

But what is your conception of happiness and delight? What is your notion of the happiness that may come as a consequence of your actions in life? It is the very same

concept that Vajasravasa had. "I shall go to heaven and be with the gods and enjoy life." But what do you mean by "enjoying life"? Can you describe to me what actually is meant by enjoyment of life? Have you any idea, the faintest notion, of what enjoyment means? If you are pressed to answer this question, you may say, "Logically and scientifically I cannot say anything about this; but it appears to me that my idea of happiness is to be in the possession of all desirable things in the world. Well! That possession is perhaps happiness for me. The greatest amount of physical wealth, the largest amount of pleasurable relations and perhaps the longest life with this body to come in contact with these objects and be in their possession—what else can be my notion of enjoyment?" This was Vajasravasa Gautama's concept, and is our concept also. Man is man, always. He never changes. What man was when the world was created, he is today, also. He is made of the same stuff. He will never change. You rub any man, you will find the same substance inside. He may be a primitive or the modern cultured, so-called educated man—they are all made of the same substance, same stuff. They have the same weaknesses and their desires are of the same character. So, what Vajasravasa Gautama thought, we also think today, and what was his fate shall be our fate, also.

But, we have something inside us, an urge that propels us in some other direction, apart from this exoteric urge which directs us to the enjoyment of the objects of sense. This something peculiar within us is the Nachiketas. The son of Vajasravasa Gautama, the progeny of the sage, is the conscience of the sage, which spoke out his heart. In the

mythical terminology of the Upanishad, the conscience of Gautama speaks in the language of his son, Nachiketas. While we are after the enjoyment of life, rulership, authority, prestige and power and whatnot, we have also a subtle voice speaking from within us, every now and then, pestering us, as it were, sometimes annoying us with its demands, telling us something quite different from what we are thinking in our mind. "Are you going to enjoy the pleasures of the world? Are you going to perform deeds and actions for this sake alone?" What are the kinds of action that we perform? They are selfish to the core. They are utterly related to our bodily personality. Though we have heard much of what is known as unselfish action, it is something quite strange to our bodily individuality.

All the deeds of our day-to-day life are remotely connected with our personal pleasures known as egoistic enjoyments. As the enjoyments are brittle, short-lived, with a beginning and an end, so are the actions which engender these pleasures. Our deeds have a beginning and an end. They started sometime and they shall end also sometime. Similarly, that fruit which accrues out of these actions also has a perishable constitution. Our longing shall never be quenched by the brittle, dry, momentary objects of the world.

Sometimes, in certain persons, almost every day, there is a shake-up of the personality from within, which tells us that we are not entirely what we appear to be. We are not the Mr. and Mrs. that we are now. We are not the boss or the servant that we appear to be. We are not the man or the woman or the child that people call us. We seem to be in

possession of something, a little different from all these things which are the ultimate values of earthly existence. That something seems to speak to us from within, oftentimes, and makes us restless. If at all we are restless in our day-to-day existence, it is because we are made up of something which is a little different from what we are constituted of in our physical existence. If our physical personality and our social relationships in the world are to be the all, then there would be no uneasiness in life. Our unhappiness, our sorrowwhatever be the kind of that sorrow—our insecurity, whatever be its character, is born of a stuff of which we are made in the deepest recesses of our being, which boils up to the surface and struggles to gain access into the surface of consciousness. But we stifle its words, we hush it down and curse it to death, as Vajasravasa Gautama did to his son. "You go on speaking again and again. You go to hell!" This is what we tell our conscience. If our subtle conscience begins to give us a wise advice occasionally—"Friend, you are going wrong!"—you stifle it, cut its throat, and curse it to hell. "Speak not again," do we tell it; and we make it blunt, and it cries within us. Our real nature within is weeping, "Oh, what is my fate!" We have layers of personality, a description of which is given beautifully in this Upanishad, about which we shall speak on the succeeding days.

The layers of our personality corresponding also to the layers of the outer cosmos speak in their own languages at different moments of time. We do not entirely belong to this earth, because we have other layers of personality which cannot belong to the surface of the physical world.

We are not merely social individuals or entities. Our relationship is not one of father and mother, father and son, mother and son, daughter, brother, sister, boss, subordinate, this and that, as we usually imagine. We have within ourselves mysteries which we ourselves do not understand, and cannot understand. This amounts to saying, we do not know our own selves. We cannot know our own selves under the present circumstance. What is beneath our own skin, we cannot say. Our endowment, the faculty of the highest character with which we are blessed in this human life, the intelligence that we are possessed of, is skin-deep. We cannot go beneath the skin. Therefore we cannot know the other layers of our personality which are more real than what appear outside. Unfortunately for us though, what is invisible in our own personality is more real than what is visible in the outer personality of ours. The real 'I', the real 'you', the real 'we' is screened away from the intelligence that works in unison with the senses, so that when you see the world, you are not seeing the real world. When you think about yourself, you are not thinking about the real 'you' in you. When you conceive the relationships that you have with others, you are not really conceiving or understanding the real relationship that you have with others. Your loves and affections—your relationships with others in the form of like and dislike—all are misconceptions, root and branch. All our activities, it follows from this analysis, are also a thorough outcome of a complete misconception of life. We are done for if this state of affairs is to continue. We cannot say what will happen to

us and what will befall us if this misery of misconception in our own selves is to continue for endless years.

One who cannot understand oneself cannot also understand others, because understanding is a faculty of oneself, and if this faculty is to be the judge and the instrument for other personalities in this world, if that itself has gone wrong, well, your relationship with other people would also be a misconception that has gone wrong entirely. Well, it follows, again, that your understanding of the world also is a misconception. When you do not know yourself, you do not know other things, you do not also know the world as a reality. So the whole series of our experiences in life is a piled up layer of clouds of misconception, sorrow piled over sorrow, grief coming upon grief, misery incarnate in this life. "*Anityam asukham lokam*," says Bhagavan Sri Krishna. What is this world? We do not know when it started and when it will end. Every moment it changes, without any notice being given to us. Therefore misery indeed is this world*asukham*. Why is this misery? Because experience, which is inseparable from the pleasures and pains of life, is based on an understanding which is thoroughly mistaken. Outwardly and inwardly, to the right and to the left, in the top and the bottom, everywhere we live in a misconceived world.

The Katha Upanishad breaks through this fortress of ignorance, pierces through the veil of this darkness of the series of misconceptions we seem to be involved in, and takes us to the heart of things, and enthrones us on the empyrean of immortal existence, eternal life, infinite

satisfaction. Wonderful is this Upanishad. God shall bless you with this knowledge.

DISCOURSE NO. 2

We observed yesterday that our present experiences seem to be involved in a misconception. With this point of view, the instruction of the Katha Upanishad begins. When Nachiketas, the seeker, rejects the grand presents offered by Yama and insists on a practical answer being given to the question of the nature of the soul on its dissolution, the teacher recognises in Nachiketas a fit disciple to receive this supreme knowledge, and immediately goes to the very heart of the question.

There are two sides of experience, which pull a person in two different directions:

śreyaś ca preyaś ca manuṣyam etas tau samparītya vivinakti dhīraḥ.
śreyo hi dhīro'bhipreyaso vṛṇīte, preyo mando yoga-kṣemād vṛṇīte.

This is the first precept of the great teacher Yama, the Lord of Death. There are two directions along which the mind of man moves, viz. the outward and the inward. The outward path is the way of pleasure and enjoyment. The inward way is that of the search for Reality. The two terms, *sreyas* and *preyas*, used in this instructive sentence, refer to blessedness and sensory satisfaction respectively. The human mind is always after immediate results. It does not care so much for ultimate values. "What does it bring to me now, whatever may happen to me tomorrow? I may even be hanged tomorrow, but today I must have the satisfaction." This seems to be the usual argument and the wish of the human mind—perhaps of every kind of mind in creation.

But the great Master says, it is an utter folly on the part of the mind to assume an attitude of the solution of problems by coming in contact with objects of sense merely because they bring immediate satisfaction. What is immediate satisfaction, after all?

Satisfactions are of various kinds. Whenever we come under the compulsion of an urge and get under its thumb, a release from its clutches appears to be a satisfaction. When a creditor comes and sits at your door, if he goes away from there, it is a great satisfaction because his presence there is a heavy pressure on your mind. If an *amin* comes with a warrant from the court and enquires whether the master of the house is there, if the gentleman goes away from there for a few minutes, it is a great satisfaction. If you have incurable eczema all over the body and you are itching all over the skin and you scratch it, the scratch brings a great satisfaction. There is burning hunger from within like fire flaming forth; you have not eaten for several days, you have a meal—it is a great satisfaction. You are boiling with anger at somebody and you give vent to your feelings by blurting out certain ignoble words—it gives a great satisfaction. So, satisfactions are umpteen, numberless, all amounting to a release of the nervous and psychological tension caused by an incurable urge that has arisen from within, of which we are not masters but only slaves.

Satisfaction seems to be a consequence of our being slaves, of not being masters. We are under the pressure of a particular power that rises from within us, which has its own say in every matter. Human satisfaction, therefore, is nothing but yielding to a particular urge. It may be a

nervous urge; it may be a physical urge of any kind; it may be a purely mental, emotional or volitional urge. You have been pressurised in a particular manner, and to yield to that pressure brings satisfaction. This is a negative approach to the solution of problems. Merely because the creditor has gone away, the problem has not been solved. Because the warrant *amin* could not find you on a particular day, the problem has not vanished. Because you have been scratching your itches for days and days, it does not mean that you have been cured of the disease. Because you are taking food every day, it does not mean that you have ceased from being mortal. We do not seek for a solution of problems, because we find that they are beyond us, apparently. So we simply want to follow the psychology or the tactics of the ostrich which hides or buries its head in sand under the impression that nobody sees it, though the larger part of its body is outside it.

The human mind is a fool, really. It understands nothing, but yet it assumes an arrogance of all-knowingness and omniscience. Nothing can be worse than this attitude of the mind—knowing nothing and imagining that it knows everything. This attitude is called ignorance. This is called vanity. This is egoism. To assume an attitude of what you are not, that is *ahamkara*. But the whole of life is nothing but a pretension of this kind. In every one of our activities and attitudes, and even our expressions and speeches and conduct and behaviour, we are hypocritical to the core, if we go deeply into the matter. We do not expose ourselves, because that exposure of our true personality would go contrary to the assumed satisfaction which we

wish to acquire through contact of senses with objects. There is, thus, a psychological cloud covering our mind, as psychoanalysts would tell us. Our great psychoanalysts, masters of the West like Freud, Adler and Jung, have told much about this subject of how the human mind can be completely clouded over by factors which have been allowed to grow like accretions upon the tablet of the mind, until a time comes when the cloud itself becomes a reality and the mind becomes a subsidiary fungus, as it were, growing as if it is not there at all with any importance of its own. This is what we call *samskaras* in Sanskrit, impressions of perceptions, cognitions, desires, etc.

The great Master of the Katha Upanishad points to the unfortunate position of the human mind when he says that *preyas* or the asking for sensory gratification is a folly. It is not a wisdom on our part. To ask for any kind of pleasure in the world is not an aspect or form of knowledge, for knowledge is identical with *sreyas* or blessedness. Your good or real prosperity lies not in your yielding to urges or to psychological pressure, but in your being a controller, a regulator, a restrainer, or a master over these urges.

According to the science of psychoanalysis, there is no such thing as individual freedom. It is all compulsion, urge, which is mistaken for freedom of will. We are not going to enter into this subject here, but I am only mentioning it as a side-issue to point out to what extent we can become slaves of such forces of psychology from within, of which we have absolutely no knowledge. The hypnotic condition is an instance on hand. When a patient is hypnotised by a physician, the patient acts as if he has freedom of his own.

He goes in a particular way, speaks in a particular mood; and if you ask him as to why he is going in that direction, why did he do this particular thing, he will say, "Well, I wanted to do it." He will never be aware that he has been pressurised by the will of the physician when under hypnosis. So freedom, at least from the point of view of psychological analysis, is a chimera. It does not exist. You mistake the forgetfulness of your background of action for freedom of will that you are deliberately exercising. You take your lunch everyday with a freedom of choice. Nobody compels you to eat. So you can say that the daily breakfast or lunch or supper that you are partaking of is an act of free will. But it is not. You are compelled to do it. Why? Because an illness has arisen within you in the form of hunger and thirst. You cannot call it an act of free will. Even the choice of items of food depends upon one's physiological structure and condition.

A student of yoga should be a very thoroughgoing psychologist to understand his own mind or her own mind, because the practice of yoga implies a knowledge of the workings of the mind. If you know nothing about the mind, the practice of yoga is far from you. There should not be any kind of predisposition, prejudice, taking for granted or mere assumption, irrationally. You must be an expert analyst of your own mind.

We mistake enjoyments for acts of freedom, which is far from the truth, says Yama, the teacher of the Katha Upanishad. The man of wisdom chooses the blessed and the good rather than the pleasant and the satisfying to the senses. Both come to you. The blessed and the pleasant—

both are before you. You can choose any one. Man is free either to stand or to fall. This is the endowment which God has bestowed upon human nature. *Sreyas* and *preyas*—both are at your disposal. Nectar and poison—both are kept in two cups before you. You can drink whichever you like. But the glamour of the poison kept in a beautiful cup is more attractive than the immortalising essence of nectar that seems to be covered in a bushel. Truth is hidden, whereas appearance is visible to the eyes. The hero, the courageous individual bent upon probing into the mysteries of Reality, chooses what is ultimately real and not what appears to be immediately valuable. In the practice, in the search for knowledge, you have to be cautious to see that you do not get entrapped by appearance. All is not gold that glitters. Truth is covered with a golden vessel. Appearances are deceptive. You cannot judge the worth of a book by the cover and the get-up of it. But this is the fate of man! On account of a mistaken attitude developed due to yielding to the urges of sense, man denies the hereafter:

na sāmparāyaḥ pratibhāti bālam pramādyantaṁ
vittamohena mūḍham:
ayaṁ loko nāsti para iti mānī, punaḥ punar vaśam
āpadyate me.

The egoistic individual that man is, confined as he is to the perceptions of the senses, takes the world for reality and does not admit the existence of anything beyond and behind the visible scene. "This world is all, and nothing is beyond." This is the argument of the senses, and this is the argument of man! "Why do you say that?" "Because I do not see it." "That which is the visible is the real, the invisible

is not the real," is the human argument. But, unfortunately for us, the reverse is the truth. The real is the invisible, and the visible is not the real.

The visible, the seen world, is a conglomeration of action and reaction. The world that you see before you, the objects that are presented before the senses, the solid substances and the tangible presentations in front of us, are not what they are. Experience as it is presented through the senses is nothing but a network of reactions. The way in which reactions are set up by objects in their relation to the senses and the mind, produces an illusion in our consciousness. Depth can be seen where there is only a flat surface, as in a cinema, for example. There is only a flat screen. There is no depth or three-dimensional picture. But when you go and see a picture, you see a three-dimensional personality and movement. You can see miles of distance projected through the screen, though the screen is only a surface. It is only two-dimensional. If you have a concave or a convex glass put on your eyes, a lens of a particular kind, you will see ups and downs where there is only a level ground, and vice versa. Your vision is, therefore, not trustworthy. Your tongue will tell you different things when your bodily temperature is of a different degree. Tastes and visions, auditions and touches, smells, etc. are not reliable agents of knowledge. They produce an illusion of experience on account of a particular type of reaction they set up due to a given type of contact established between them and the objects of a given nature at a given moment of time. This is why we say that the world is *relative.* It is relative in the sense that every experience is dependent on

some factor or the other. The world is not made up of one or two factors alone but hundreds and thousands of constituents form the world of experience. Just as a piece of cloth is made up of several threads—one thread cannot make a cloth—the world is not made up of one type of experience, one factor alone that is conditioned. The mind of man, being wedded to the report of the senses, is able to grasp only an aspect of experience, totally oblivious of other factors which are also equally contributory to this particular type of experience. As medical men sometimes tell us, a particular visible form of disease is not always caused by one factor alone. It is an effect of cumulative conditions that were gradually growing from within, without our knowledge of them. You do not suddenly fall sick. You have been tending towards it for days together or perhaps for months. It is not a sudden experience. The whole universe is made up of items of determining factors. It is one single pattern created by God, if you would like to call it a creation at all, and no factor of it can be isolated from other factors.

Every event is a universal event. There is no such thing as a local event taking place in a corner or a corridor of the world. You cannot say that a particular event has taken place only in a *mohalla* or a lane of a particular town. No such thing is the truth. Every experience, every event, every action, is a universal event. It takes place, in a conditioned form, everywhere in the world. Every illness is a total illness of the body. It is not an illness only of the nose or the eyes or the feet. The whole personality is sick even when there is only a sneeze that has come out from your nose. Likewise, every experience is a universal conditioning event, of which

we have no knowledge because of our mind being tethered to a bodily locality and the mind's mistaking this bodily locality for the entire reality. As the Bhagavadgita tells us, this is *tamasic* knowledge:

yat tu kṛtsnavad ekasmin kārye saktam ahaitukam
atattv ārthavad alpaṁ ca tat tāmasam udāhṛtam

Mistaking a part for the whole, the body for reality, a localised experience as all-in-all is the worst kind of knowledge that one can have. It is not knowledge at all. It is a form of ignorance. On this ignorance is based our sensory enjoyment, and when it is mistaken for reality, you deny God and deny the existence of the hereafter. *Na samparayah pratibhati balam*: 'Childish is the mind of that individual who denies the hereafter and takes this world itself as the all.' What is the result of this ignorance? *Punah punar vasam apadyate*: 'The individual falls into the net of births and deaths in a series of metempsychosis.'

Births and deaths are the punishment meted out to the individual for its ignorance of the law of the cosmos. Every type of ignorance of law is punishable under the code of the government. The government of the universe inflicts a penalty on the human individual; and all individuals in the world, in the shape of transmigratory existence, as people, are sent to jail or reformatories for training themselves and becoming better. Births and deaths are nothing but processes of experience and training in this institution of the universe so that, by repeated births and deaths, you gain experience and move towards what is real, turning away, gradually, from what is an appearance.

The teachings of the Upanishad are an exposition of the various stages of the ascent of man to Truth. It is a wonderful scripture, like the Bhagavadgita. The different degrees of approach to Reality and the method of approach to Reality through these various degrees form the exposition of the Katha Upanishad. The sacrifice of Gautama Vajasravasa, the feelings of the lad Nachiketas in respect of the charities and the philanthropic acts of his father, the rising of the soul of Nachiketas to the abode of Yama and his fasting for three days in that abode, the appearance of Yama after three days and nights and bestowing of boons of a threefold character upon Nachiketas, and the wonderful instructions Yama gave to Nachiketas, are all descriptions of the stages of the rise of the soul to the Absolute.

The first stage is the exoteric approach of the human mind to the values of the world—the mistaking of the external for the ultimate, which is represented by the sacrifice of Vajasravasa Gautama. The world is a real presentation as it is in its crass form, and the after-death experiences are supposed to be merely a copy of the present life experiences, only in a more rarefied form, so that the popular conception of heaven after death is of a magnified form of the pleasures of sense that we have in this earthly world. If you get *kheer* only occasionally here, you will get *kheer* every day there! This is the type of joy that we seem to aspire for in the sensory world of the gods. We have no concept of God or the Creator, or the hereafter, except in terms of what we experience today. This is why Vajasravasa Gautama aspired for a heaven of satisfaction through the

senses, and therefore he thought that a mechanical act of pretended charity can also procure for him such an enjoyment of the senses, because he was not prepared to part with everything that he had. Nothing can be so painful to the human ego as to part with its own pleasures. It wants to seek satisfaction of the senses both here and hereafter. If the scriptures tell you to give in charity so that you may become happy in the heaven hereafter, you try to make a counterfeit charity of giving only a coin that will not work anywhere, or a torn currency note. You imagine it is a charity. You have given in charity, and yet you have not lost anything! Sometimes you give in charity only to your dear and near friends. You give a lot of charity to your own son when he is educated in the college, or bring wonderful *saris* to your wife. This is a great charity, indeed. You give two pence to the poor servant who washes your vessels. This charity will not procure you anything worth the while. But this was the type of mistaken charity carried on by Vajasravasa Gautama. The Upanishad explains beautifully the fate of the human mind in a state of ignorance.

The mind rises beyond this level in the conscience of Nachiketas and searches for a meaning in life, which comes to us as a teacher in the form of the observance of the transience of all phenomena. Death is the greatest teacher. Yama is, therefore, the great Guru of the Katha Upanishad. You will not learn a lesson better than through the experience of the transitory nature of things. When you have lost all your belongings, when your life itself is at stake, you learn a lesson better than you learn in universities. People lose all their belongings in political

revolutions, of which you can read through the history of the nations. The lessons they learn are sufficient for them throughout their lives. The transitory nature of things points to the existence of an eternal value in life. This is why Yama comes into the picture of the Katha Upanishad. When you lose everything, as in a political catastrophe, you begin to feel that there is no worth in life at all. "Oh, everything has gone! I have lost my relatives. I have lost my property. All my bank balance is gone. I am not sure whether I am secure in my physical life itself." Awful is one's situation at that time. Nobody can explain it through discourse or study of books. One who has passed through this stage will know what it is. But, even then, we do not learn the lesson properly. We once again come back to the same old groove of thinking when we are placed in better circumstances. That is to say, even if death itself is to threaten you with its uplifted rod—*yamadanda*—and you are frightened for a moment and wish to turn to the ultimate Truth, God, when the rod is withdrawn you go back to the rut of old thinking, and the pleasures of sense attract you. This is what happened to Nachiketas, also. Though Yama himself came as the great Master of the teaching of the yoga, knowledge was not immediately bestowed upon even such a qualified student as Nachiketas. It is not that you can go to a Guru and say, "Teach me; I have got to catch a train in the evening." There are many students who come here and say, "I have only half an hour at my disposal. Can you tell me something about yoga?" This sort of yoga will carry you nowhere. You may catch the train first, and then come. This mechanised and

merchandised yoga will not be of any use. It is a foolhardy attempt and a mockery of God Himself.

Nachiketas, a first-rate student of yoga, was not given this knowledge, what to talk of second class and third class students! We are much below that; and Nachiketas was a superlatively good student, and yet Yama said, "Don't ask, don't talk." And, what was given to him? The wealth of the whole world—temptation! Buddha was tempted. Christ was tempted. None will be free from these temptations. And it does not mean that all the students of yoga will have to pass through the same kind of temptation, so that you can catalogue the temptations and keep them in your mind. No! They come in different forms, though the background of the temptations is one and the same. Just as, though everyone has the same kind of hunger every day, everyone does not eat the same diet—your likings for diet vary according to your own predilections and physiological condition, though hunger is uniform and equal in every individual—likewise, temptations are uniformly present on the path of yoga, but the forms in which they come vary from individual to individual, so that what I face will not be the same as what you have to face. You cannot say what will come to you tomorrow.

The temptations which the scriptures speak of in our search for reality are nothing but the reactions set up by the desires of the mind and the senses. The desires are not exhausted even if there is a tentative discriminative faculty arisen in us. You may be aware of the existence of a higher reality which you have to aspire for—*vivekashakti* might have dawned in your mind, a sense of *vairagya* or

dispassion for appearances also might be there—but this will not do. The personality of the human individual is deep, far deeper than what it appears on the surface. A withdrawal of oneself from physical contact with objects of sense does not mean renunciation, totally. If you abstain from physical contact with objects by living in a sequestered place, the desire for them will still remain. The liking for the objects of sense is a mental condition which is different from actual physical contact with the objects, so that even if you are in a holy place like Badrinath or Kedarnath, you may be contemplating in the mind the old pleasures that you have experienced and inwardly dream, "Oh! I am far from them". The *rasa* or the taste for enjoyment does not cease, even if you are physically weaned away from objects. This is condemned in the Bhagavadgita as hypocrisy:

karmendriyāṇi saṁyamya ya āste manasā smaran
indriy ārthān vimūḍhātmā mithāchārāḥ sa ucyate.

Futile is the attempt of that seeker who withdraws his physical senses from contact with objects in the name of *vairagya* or austerity, but allows the mind inwardly to contemplate them in some form or the other. He will not succeed. A husband may be away from his wife, but thinking of his wife. The mother may be away from her son, but the mind is thinking of her son. This will not yield any benefit in the way of virtue. What you think in the mind is more important than what you physically come in contact with. Yoga is a mental process, a psychological effort; it is not a physical activity of the body. So, let us not mistake physical conduct for virtue or the otherwise of it. Man is

mind, and mind is man. The study of mind is the study of man, and the study of man is the study of mind. Your physical features do not represent you wholly. A mere assessment of what takes place on the conscious level of our personality will not give us the knowledge of what we are essentially. The desires of the human being are buried deep beneath the conscious level. So, even if you are consciously free from desires, you cannot be free from them subconsciously. The subconscious seeds of an urge for sensory gratification set up reactions in the counterpart of the cosmos outside and come as temptations. What happened to Nachiketas will happen to everybody. What happened to Buddha will be our experience also, and everyone has to pass through the same 'strait gate' as the Christ put it.

Narrow is the passage to the Eternal. You cannot take your bag and baggage with you when you go there. You cannot take your purse with you. You cannot take your clothing, even. You cannot take even this body through that narrow gate. You have to drop everything. Such is the subtlety, such is the narrowness, such is the sharpness of that path—*kshurasya dhara*, as the Katha Upanishad would tell us. Like the sharp edge of a razor or the cutting point of a sword is the path of spirituality. Therefore, the more cautious you are in the understanding of your own nature, the better it is for you. The less arrogant you are, the better it is for you. An assumption of knowledge on the part of the human individual or a seeker of Truth is not going to help him in his pursuits. Humility is the first prerogative of a true search for knowledge. *Vidya* (knowledge) and *vinaya*

(humility) go together, says the Bhagavadgita. But, unfortunately, the more is the learning, the more is also the arrogance of man today. You want a pedestal, a higher seat, because you are learned; but the path of God is different from the way of the world. Study the lives of great saints like St. Francis of Assisi, the great masterminds like the Alvars and Nayanars of our own country, great saints like Purandaradas, Tukaram—how they lived. They possessed nothing. They wanted nothing. They never craved for position and prestige or name, not even a thanking word from anybody. They were the lowest of individuals from the point of view of the human evaluation of values, but they were the greatest persons from the point of view of the higher values of life. It is difficult to tread the path of yoga. Nothing can be more difficult than this arduous struggle of the soul.

The urges within our personality come as temptations of various kinds and types. When you tread the path of yoga, the first thing that you will face or encounter is a temptation which you cannot resist. No one can resist temptations, because temptations come not as temptations. The devil does not come in the form of a devil; otherwise you will recognise it. The devil comes as a saint, and you mistake the devil for the saint. The urge for sensory gratification, the urge for satisfying the ego comes as a necessity of life. "Oh, it is a necessity," is what you argue within yourself. It is a need. It is not a temptation. It is a virtue. Attachment will be mistaken for compassion. Passion and greed will be mistaken for the needs of life. Egoism will be mistaken for altruistic activity. One thing

can be mistaken for another. The world will be mistaken for God. Pain can be mistaken for pleasure. Illusion can be mistaken for realisation. All these are encounters on the path.

This is why we say a Guru is necessary. The Guru will tell you where you stand and what is happening to you. One cannot know what will happen to oneself the next moment, and when an encounter comes, one cannot know what is actually before him—whether it is a Ravana or a *sannyasin*. You cannot find out. He was Ravana himself but he appeared as a *sannyasin* and poor Sita got entrapped. So Yama tempts Nachiketas, and we shall also be tempted. We are being tempted even today, and just now also, and we do not know what is happening to us. It is only when we refuse the temptations set before us that illumination dawns and practical discrimination between appearance and reality arises within us. Then it is that we begin to accept the existence of a value and a reality beyond what is presented to the senses.

The stage of withdrawal and experience described in the Katha Upanishad includes at least three fundamental levels of the passage of the soul. The lowest and the first experience is the world of perception through the senses, which is represented by the sacrifice of Vajasravasa Gautama. The second is the rise of aspiration within the individual, symbolised in the search for Truth in the mind of Nachiketas. Then comes the temptation, and then comes the revelation of knowledge. This knowledge of reality also comes by stages. It does not come suddenly like the rise of the sun at six o'clock in the morning. It has stages, and it

comes very gradually; as they say in a proverb, while knowledge comes, wisdom lingers. It does not come as quickly as ordinary scientific knowledge comes. From the external, the souls gradually rise to greater and greater approximation to reality by self-discipline, *tapas* or austerity, represented in the three fasts observed by Nachiketas. Nachiketas fasted for three days and nights.

Nachiketas is the seeking soul, and the three fasts are the threefold discipline of the human individuality. The entire yoga is here given in a nutshell. The three levels of the human individuality, corresponding to the three levels of the cosmos outside, are to be disciplined. They should not be given a vent or a long rope for indulgence externally. The physical, represented by sensory activity, the psychological, constituting emotion, will, etc., and the spiritual, are the fundamental stages of the ascent for which sake Nachiketas, the individual soul seeking Reality or Truth, observed a fast. What is a fast? It is withdrawal from indulgence—the gradual subdual of the sensory powers.

The bodily individuality is represented by sensory activity. Our bodies are weak, incapable of meeting the onslaught of natural forces on account of our yielding to the urges of sense. We cannot bear heat, we cannot bear cold, we cannot bear hunger, we cannot bear thirst, we cannot bear a strong wind, we cannot bear a flood. Natural forces are uncontrollable. Nature in its physical form has been estranged from the human personality on account of the yielding of the individual to the senses. The senses create a gap between the individual and the world outside. They tell you that the world is outside you, unconnected

with you and you have to dread it, and sometimes cringe before it. You know that the world is more powerful than you in every way. We seem to be a nobody before it. We are afraid of all kinds of natural forces. So the fast of the senses, which represents the first discipline of a level of the human personality, releases such energy that you master the physical forces of nature. That is the first boon granted to Nachiketas: "When you return to the world, you will go as a master and not as a servant." The world will recognise you as its friend and not as its enemy. The realised soul can come back to the world after a type of realisation, and when the realised soul comes back to the world, the world receives that soul in a different way from what it did earlier. The world treats you in a particular way now, in your state of ignorance, but will treat you differently when you meet it with knowledge. That is why Nachiketas asked, "When I go back to the world, may I be greeted with recognition and not with wrath and anger." "Yes, may it be so," said Yama, the Lord of Death. This means to say that even by the reception of a single boon, let alone the other two, you will become a master of the physical forces. The world will not threaten you any more. It will become your friend. At present the world is not our friend. That means we are afraid of it. The world is not our friend today, at this present moment of time, because the senses have created an attitude of estrangement between us and the world. "If you come to my residence and I treat you as a stranger, you will also treat me as a stranger; but if I treat you as a friend, as if I know you from eternity, you will be so immensely pleased and will treat me as your friend." The world will treat you

in the same way as you treat it. If you regard it as external to you, it will also treat you as external to it. If you say you are a foreigner, the world will tell you, "You are also a foreigner, come with a visa and passport, as you have no place for me. You get out," it says, and you get out afterwards, one day or the other. You die because of estrangement of personality from the world—otherwise there would be no birth and death. If you unite yourself with the forces of the world, there will be no birth and death. Births and deaths are the consequence of estrangement of personality from natural forces. So the first day's fast of Nachiketas, physically through the withdrawal of the senses, created a reaction from the master of yoga, Yama, in the form of bestowal of a boon with such energy that it received the world as an organic part of its own self. The physical world became a friend of Nachiketas. This will happen to us, also. We are also Nachiketas, individually. Everyone is a Nachiketas, because Nachiketas is only a representation of a seeking soul. So when you control your senses, what will happen to you? The world will receive you as its friend and well-wisher. The consequence of sense-control is abundance in every way. You will not lack anything in this world, afterwards. All things will flow to you like rivers entering the ocean.

āpūryamāṇam acala-pratiṣṭhaṁ samudram āpaḥ praviśanti yadvat
tadvat kāmā yam praviśanti sarve sa śāntim āpnoti na kāma-kāmī

says the Bhagavadgita. As rivers enter the ocean from all sides, all that you need will come to you like a flood coming

from different directions. You need not run after the world; the world will run after you. You need not ask for anything from the world; it will come to you automatically, without your asking for it. This is the first boon, due to the first *tapas* of Nachiketas.

The second *tapas* is of a psychological character. This second day's fast of Nachiketas represents the subdual of the mind, not merely of the senses. When the mind is disciplined properly, it gradually gets attuned to the cosmos. This is the secret of the *Vaishvanara-Agni-Vidya* which came to Nachiketas as a boon from Yama. While the control of the senses physically makes you a friend of the physical universe and all material things flow to you in abundance, and you become the richest of persons, literally, you become a master of the psychological world also—not merely of the physical world or of material things—in the higher stage of mind-control. The second fast of Nachiketas is therefore a psychological fast of the mind and all that constitutes the psychological stuff—*mano-buddhi-ahamkara-chitta*, as it's called. All the aspects of the psychological organs are disciplined in the second form of *tapas*. While the physical body is estranged from the physical world on account of the activity of the senses, the mind is estranged from the Cosmic Mind on account of the spatio-temporal linkage. You think in terms of space and time, objectivity or externality, and therefore you are estranged from the Cosmic Mind. In such a condition, even God does not seem to help you. Your prayers do not seem to reach Him at all. Why? Because you have cut yourself off from the source of cosmic energy by thinking individually,

by the egoistic affirmation of personality. The second *tapas* or discipline of Nachiketas, the seeking soul, means, thus, the uniting of the individual mind with the Universal Mind, the result of which is the second boon bestowed by the Master of yoga, Yama.

Vaishvanara-Agni-Vidya represents the knowledge of the cosmic fire. In certain philosophies, fire is regarded as the Ultimate Reality. For example, there was a Greek philosopher, Heraclitus by name, who considered cosmic truth as a form of fire. This is not an original thought of Heraclitus alone. In India also we regard *agni*, fire, as the symbol of the Ultimate Will. The very first mantra of the Rig Veda is an invocation of this fire, not the physical fire with which you cook your meal but the universal fire which is a representation of cosmic energy—the *Vaishvanara-Agni*. *Aham vaisvanaro bhutva praninam deham asritah*—"I, the Supreme Soul, work as the *Vaishvanara-Agni* within the individual," says Bhagavan Sri Krishna in the Bhagavadgita. A knowledge of this *Vaishvanara-Agni*, which is the cosmic form of the Creator, brings universal abundance. This knowledge of the supreme creative principle came to Nachiketas as a result of the fast of the psychological personality. From the external, you go to the inward, and then to the universal.

The external world has become your friend. Now the inner world also becomes your friend. Wonderful is this experience. Sometimes, this inner experience of the universal is mistaken for the ultimate realisation itself. But it is not the ultimate, really. There is one more step, which was the point of the third question of Nachiketas, which

comes later on, about which Yama was very reluctant to speak—and so rightly.

The second boon represents the cosmical identification of the individual psychological unit. You become cosmically aware of things. While in the first stage of your union with the physical forces of nature—the result of the first *tapas*, the first fast, the effect of your attunement with the physical universe—you become abundant in material possession, rich in every sense of the term, now, in the second stage, you become rich in knowledge, also. A yogi is rich physically, and also psychologically. A yogi is not a poor person. He has everything with him. Even the richest man of the world cannot be equal to the yogi in the wealth of possession. He can command everything in the world. H. H. Sri Swami Sivanandaji Maharaj used to say, in a humorous way, that a *sannyasin* has no bank balance, but he can operate upon the bank balance of every person. A *sannyasin* has no motor car, but he can travel in anybody's car. Well, in this humour he gave out a great truth. The yogi lacks nothing, even materially. Do not think that when a yogi aspires for only *moksha*, he is poverty-stricken in the world. Not so. He is rich even materially, physically. He is alive to every value in life. He is not dead to anything. The first fast of Nachiketas through the control of the senses, made him physically, visibly, healthy and rich in every sense of the term. Now, the second fast of the psychological organs makes him rich in the wisdom of cosmic existence. Both material prosperity and the prosperity of knowledge are bestowed upon the individual. You have everything visible, as also invisible. Lakshmi and Saraswati are under

your control, as it were. Lakshmi represents material prosperity, and Saraswati the prosperity of wisdom, knowledge, learning, scholarshipomniscience itself. So a *yogin* becomes a master of the physical forces. All abundance is poured upon the *yogin* from all sides of the cosmos, and he begins to know all things. Knowledge and power are the immediate results of the practice of yoga. You become abundant in knowledge and wisdom, and abundant in power and control over the nature of things. A *yogin* is immensely powerful and immensely wise.

So, the first two stages of the experience in the practice of yoga are thus described as physical mastery and psychological mastery, attunement of the physical and the attunement of the psychological. Now comes the spiritual. This is the most difficult part to understand. To some extent you may appreciate what is told to you up to this time, but what is going to be told in future is hard for the mind to stomach. That is why the great master, Yama, said that even the gods cannot understand it properly.

devair atrāpi vicikitsitam purā na hi suvijñeyam, aṇur eṣa dharmaḥ.

"Nachiketas! Subtle is this thing that you are asking for. The whole universe can be under you and all the knowledge of the world, omniscience itself, can be bestowed upon you; but the other thing that you are asking for—what happens to the soul after it leaves this body and attains to universality—this is something which even the celestials cannot explain and, therefore, I request you not to insist upon the answer to this question of yours. But you are not leaving me. All right! I shall tell you something about it, but

difficult it is to understand." Not even the best of *yogins* of the world can realise what it means. We have many *yogins* in this world, but how many have really absorbed the import of this teaching, it is difficult to say. Well! Such a great aspirant as Nachiketas is shooed of by Yama; but we say, "Oh! I will tell you, come, come!" We want more and more disciples. International yoga organisations are plenty. Wonderful! This yoga will take us nowhere. We should not become a laughing stock. The forces of nature will laugh at us when we practise this hypocritical yoga of advertisement and publicity. Yoga is not publicity. Nachiketas himself must have known it much better than we do. He said, "No. Thank God. You take it back." Suppose we are told, "All the three worlds are yours, take them," we would naturally not allow this 'yoga' to bother us then. Three worlds! It is unthinkable! Even such a thing as that, Nachiketas did not wish. We are every day praying to God, "Please bestow long life on my child!" You want five years increase in your life! But Nachiketas said, "The longest life, I do not want. One may live as long as the universe lasts; I am not interested. What does it matter to me?"

The third asking of Nachiketas is a wondrous asking. Wonderful is the asker of this question! Wonderful is the answer to this question! The answer was given to Nachiketas finally, because Nachiketas was made of such a stern stuff within him. He rejected all the tempting objects of the world. Even universal knowledge was not sufficient to Nachiketas. The *Vaishvanara-Agni-Vidya* was not

adequate. And what is this question of Nachiketas, the third question?

ye-yam prete vicikitsā manuṣye ystī-tyeke nāyam astīti caike.

"Does the soul exist, or does the soul not exist? What is it? Is it, or is it not? What do you mean by the soul?" The question whether the soul exists or not can be answered only when we know what the soul is. Without knowing what it is, how can we say if it is or not? The science of the soul is the science of the Upanishad. We have also a concept of soul. We speak of it almost every day, and our notion of the soul is one of a child, an untutored baby speaking of a soul as if it is a spark of vital activity within our individual body. There are some people who call it *elan vital*, a vital energy that is urging us to act from within us. The soul is generally taken to be an existence within us. We say the Atman is *within,* the soul is *within.* This word 'within' is hammered upon us again and again. Why do we say that the soul is within, is one question. And what does it actually mean when we say that the soul exists within the body? What is the soul? All this has been explained in this Upanishad in a symbolic manner, though not pointedly and explicitly. Yama does not give a clear-cut answer to the question of Nachiketas, though indirectly he comes to the point. As a matter of fact, you will never find a clear answer to this question anywhere in the Katha Upanishad. The teaching goes round and round, beating about the bush, as it were, finally not telling anything clearly in respect of this last question of Nachiketas. But the secret is hidden between the lines of these sonorous mantras of the text, if

we study them with a philosophical inquisitiveness of insight. The more elaborate answers are to be found in the other Upanishads, like the Brihadaranyaka and to some extent the Chhandogya. If you want to know the entire implications of the teachings of the Katha Upanishad as an answer to the third question of Nachiketas, you may have to read the Brihadaranyaka and the Chhandogya Upanishads, because you cannot clearly understand as to what was the meaning of this last question of Nachiketas. What did he mean by asking about the character of the soul when it goes to the 'Beyond'? '*Mahati samparaye*' is the word used by Nachiketas. *Samparaya* is the 'hereafter'. That which is 'beyond' this visible world is the *samparaya.* It is not merely the 'after death' of the physical body. He is not asking what happens to the soul after physical death, though many commentators seem to interpret it in this manner. A wise person like Nachiketas must have known what happens to the soul after physical death, but that was not the issue. He had added a qualification, *mahati* to *samparaye*, meaning the Great Beyond and not the ordinary beyond. The ordinary beyond is that which immediately follows the physical death of the personality, but the Great Beyond is the condition of the soul which transcends the universe. What happens to the soul, ultimately? Where does it exist? There was a teacher, perhaps a clergyman, who told before an audience: "God created the heaven and the earth," in a biblical fashion. One of the listeners stood up: "Sir; where does God exist?" The clergyman said: "God is in heaven." "Who created heaven?" "God created even heaven." "But where did God exist

before He created heaven? God is in heaven, and if He created heaven, He must have existed even before heaven was created. Where, then, did He exist? Where does God exist before He creates the world? You say God is everywhere, which means to say, everywhere in the world. But if the world itself was not there before creation, where did He exist, then?” The answer to this question cannot be given easily. You cannot say that God is all-pervading, because that implies the world. You cannot say God is all-knowing, for that implies the world. You cannot say God is all-powerfulthat, again, implies the world. What is God, when the world is not there? This is the question of Nachiketas, when it is boiled down to its quintessence.

DISCOURSE NO. 3

The great impediments to spiritual progress are known as *avidya, kama* and *karma*—ignorance, desire and action. These three aspects of the obstacle are really a single obstacle presenting itself in three different ways. An ignorance of the true and ultimate nature of things is called *avidya*. We call it ignorance, or nescience, or the absence of knowledge, or darkness, etc. This ignorance, *avidya*, breeds a desire for the external objects of sense—*kama*. An ignorance of the character of reality, which is *avidya*, at once presupposes an affirmation of personality, *ahamkara*—and a desire to contact other personalities. *Avidya* causes *ahamkara* simultaneously. They are almost inseparable, like the heat and the light of fire. The moment there is this self-affirmation born of ignorance, there is a necessary consequence of it following, viz. a longing to make good what has been lost, by way of contact with things. That is called *kama*. To fulfil *kama* or desire there is *karma* or action. So the whole of one's life is a threefold effort of *avidya, kama* and *karma* ignorance, desire and action. *This is the tripura* or the threefold fortress of the demoniacal powers, which Lord Siva is supposed to have broken through with a single arrow. These are the three citadels made of gold, silver and iron, as they say in the Puranas. These are the three knots or *granthis—Brahma-granthi*, *Vishnu-granthi* and *Rudra-granthi* —which the *hatha-yogins* and the *kundalini-yogins* and the *tantrikas* speak of—*avidya, kama, karma*. It is a single power appearing as three independent impediments to the expression of knowledge.

triṇāciketas tribhiretya sandhiṁ trikarmakṛt tarati janma-mṛtyū.

The three fasts of Nachiketas may be compared to the soul's endeavour to break through these three fortresses, a withdrawal gradually effected from the outer to the inner, overcoming the force of *karma*, overcoming the power of *kama* and finally overcoming *avidya*. Three forms of *tapas* or austerity have to be undergone with three aids and with the help of three *sadhanas* or spiritual practices. This is what is meant by *trinachiketa*, in the Upanishad. You overcome birth and death with these three processes. You gain mastery over those conditions which limit you to the body in all its three layers of expression and to the three planes—the physical, the astral and the celestial. These are the essential bondage of the soul inwardly as well as outwardly limiting its expression and confining it to *samsara* or earthly existence and suffering. The overcoming of this threefold bondage is the implication of the term '*trinachiketa*' mentioned in the Upanishad. The instruments that have to be made use of in this effort are the mind, the intellect and the spirit (*manas-buddhi-atma*), all combined in a single-pointed effort—*tribhiretya sandhim*. You have also to perform three actions, to which a reference has been made in the eighteenth chapter of the Bhagavadgita: *trikarma—yajna, dana, tapas*. *Yajna* is the sacrifice which one performs for attaining union with Reality. It includes all forms of self-abnegation and dedication. *Yajna* is a very comprehensive term whose meaning is deep. You may, in a sense, say that the entire culture of *Bharatavarsha* is summed up in this single word,

'*yajna*'. The Lord himself is compared to *yajna—Yajno vai vishnuh*, and in the masterly Purusha-Sukta of the Vedas the whole creation is compared to a *yajna* of the Supreme Being. *Yajna* is, therefore, the supreme effort of the soul to unite itself with God. *Dana* is the charitable disposition of the soul towards others. Charity does not mean only parting with a few cents or a few rupees or dollars or pounds. Charity is an attitude of the mind. It may be expressed in the form of physical action, or it may not be so expressed. It includes charitable feelings, a charitable attitude, conduct and behaviour towards others. The capacity to appreciate the situation of others is charity. When you are in a position to enter into the feelings and the actual conditions and circumstances of other souls and other persons and feel as they feel and think as they think and act as they act, not with a sweating effort but with a spontaneous expression of your nature, that would be the essence of a charitable nature—*dana*. *Tapas* is personal discipline, bodily, verbal as well as mental. One who puts forth this threefold spiritual endeavour overcomes birth and death—*Tarati janma-mrityu*.

All this is an introductory exposition given by the Upanishad to the essential secret about which Nachiketas put his third question. Nachiketas does not expect anything else from this mighty lord of knowledge, will not be satisfied with any other offering from him than the answer to this central question which pertains to the Great Beyond, *mahati samparayae*. "This third boon that you are going to bestow upon me pertains to the innermost secret of things, the secret which is hidden in the cave of the heart of all

beings. Other than this, nothing can satisfy this Nachiketas." *Nanyam varam nachiketa vrinite.*

Now, Yama comes to the main argument of the whole Upanishad, and the heart and soul of the aspiration of Nachiketas. How can one know it? There must be something extremely difficult about it; else, Yama would not have been so reluctant to speak of it. However much you may scratch your head, rack your brain or think about it, or argue, or read, or speak, you cannot understand it.

nāyam ātmā pravacanena labhyo
na medhayā, na bahunā śrutena

Even if you ponder over it in all possible ways, you will not gain an access into this knowledge. So difficult is its deep significance to grasp. That is why Yama thought it better if he kept quiet about it. But Nachiketas would not leave him.

na nareṇāvareṇa proktā eṣa
suvijñeyo bahudhā cintyamānaḥ

An ordinary person cannot expound this mystery. An inferior type of understanding cannot appreciate it or expound it, however acute it may be from the worldly point of view. This is not the usual scientific knowledge. This is not like the studying of physics, chemistry or mathematics. This is not concerned with anything that you can see or hear or touch or taste or see. This is unconditioned knowledge and therefore conditional speech cannot express it. Thought itself being conditioned, cannot become the means to the expression or conveyance of this knowledge. How can the unconditioned be conveyed through the

conditioned? This wisdom imperishable, eternal, cannot be carried through any perishable means or a vehicle of a temporal character.

The rational faculty fails here because the highest form of rationality is merely what is available in that we call scientific knowledge. We are rightly told that religion begins where science ends. The limit of science is the beginning of the higher wisdom. On account of its subtlety of nature, this wisdom becomes superlogical. This Atman, this truth of all things, cannot be known through argument or speech or discourse, not by immense scholarship in the scriptures, not by acuteness of intellect, because the subtlety of the intellect is, after all, based on what we call the logical law or principle. Today man hangs upon the logical system of thinking as the ultimate means of knowledge. But logic is the outcome of an assumption which itself is an hypothesis taken for granted and finally indefensible. All logic is an attempt to bring about a union between what we call the subject and the predicate of an argument. Those who have studied logic, induction or deduction will know what it means. Every logical proposition is made up of a subject and a predicate, and for any sense to be conveyed, you must express it in a sentence, and the conjunction in a sentence is that which links the meaning of the predicate with the subject or the meaning of the subject with the predicate. The distinction that we make in this way between the subject and the object—you may call it the predicate—is based on a presupposed notion of the mind that things are divided among themselves. Why should you try to connect the subject with the predicate? The necessity of connecting

them arises only if they are different. But why should you take it for granted that they are already different? That you exist as a bodily individual—that this individuality observes a world outside—is a hypothesis which cannot be scientifically proved, because all scientific argument is based upon this assumption that the world exists, and that you exist as a part of it; but this assumption itself is untenable as it is merely taken for granted and is not proved. How do you know that the world exists? Because you see it! How do you know that your vision is correct? You cannot prove this logically. You have only to say it is: "I am seeing it, and therefore it must be there." This is called dogma. Science is against all dogma, but it is itself based on a dogma that the world is, and the scientist also is in it. Human understanding, ordinary intelligence is of no use here, and a lot of learning founded on this understanding, also, is of not much help. Unless you seek for another means of knowledge, altogether, there is no way of gaining entry into the mystery. *Ananya-prokte gatir atra nasti*, says the Upanishad.

The nature of reality becomes a difficulty for the human understanding because of there being no defining characteristics of reality. You cannot say it has a colour. You cannot say it has a shape. You cannot say it has any kind of quality which can be interpreted in human language. All definition is in terms of visible or sensible characters. The sensible character of an object is not the ultimate definition of it, because we are here trying to understand the essential constituent of an object and not its character as it is presented to the senses. The test of reality,

the nature of Truth or *Satya*, is non-contradiction. Truth is that which can never be contradicted by any other definition, experience or realisation, which means to say that eternity is the character of Truth. Nothing in this world can be said to be ultimately real, because everything passes into something else. The whole world is transitory. It is made up of bits of processparts, as it were, of a whole—and so it is not a completeness by itself. A juxtaposition of parts cannot be regarded as a reality, for the real is that which endures forever. We have never seen any object in this world, any person here, enduring for all times. We are told by master astronomers that even the solar system will not be ever enduring. There was a beginning for even the sun and there will be an end even for the sun. The cosmos will perish in the process of time. How can you call it real? The satisfactory definition of reality cannot be applied to any visible object. How will you define it, then? The mind of man, which is the central faculty of knowledge, depends entirely on the information gathered through the senses. The function of the mind is mostly a confirmation and association of ideas acquired, through the sensory passages. The mind does not give us any independent knowledge apart from what we obtain through the senses. What is not visible and what is not audible, what cannot be seen or heard or tasted or touched or felt, cannot also be known by the mind. So the mind also is a kind of sense—we call it the sixth sense. It has a capacity to synthesise the different reports of the senses, no doubt; but synthesis is not knowledge. In this organisation of the sensory knowledge brought about by the mind, we are not given a new,

qualitative knowledge. We are only given a new type of organisation of what is already there, come through the senses. And the intellect is only a form of judgement that is passed on to this organised knowledge of the mind. So, the intellect, the mind and the senses seem to be of a common group. They belong to the same category. What other faculty have we except the intellect, the mind and the senses? With these untrustworthy servants of knowledge, which we have employed for our knowledge, we cannot really know Truth. This is why the Katha Upanishad warns us that by sheer argument, study, intellectuality and rationality, Truth cannot be known.

Truth has to be known by one with the blessing of a special type of instrument. No commentator has been able to properly explain what this term '*ananya-prokte*', in the Upanishad, actually means. Many of the words used in the Upanishad are cryptic. They are like difficult nuts which you cannot easily crack. *Ananya*, grammatically, means 'other than what is already there', or 'different from what is there', or 'non-difference'. This word occurs also in the Bhagavadgita, and even there the commentators vary in the interpretation of what it really signifies. The teacher should
not be an '*anya*', or an 'other', but must be an '*ananya*', a 'non-other'. An '*ananya*', is one who is 'not different from that which he teaches'. Nowadays we have learned men, professors, who are supposed to be repositories of knowledge, but their lives are different from what they preach. They are '*anya*' or 'other' from knowledge. The practical life of a professor is different from

what he teaches in his college. When knowledge is different from life, such knowledge becomes a husk without substance. It is a burden that you carry, like an ass carrying bricks. Knowledge becomes valuable when it becomes '*ananya*' with one's own life. Knowledge becomes meaningful when it is lived, and not merely taught, or heard, or read about. *Knowledge* is identical with *being—sat* and *chit* are regarded as identical. Your *sat* or existence, or life, is to be in conformity with your *chit*, or what you know, teach and study. So, this knowledge can be imparted only by one who is established in a practical knowledge of Truth, one who is a *brahmanishtha*. A Guru is supposed to be a *shrotriya* and a *brahmanishtha*. A *shrotriya* is one who has a thorough insight into the meaning of the scriptures and has the capacity to express it in the best form of language. A *brahmanishtha* is one who is established in the knowledge of Truth. It is said that the Guru should be both a *brahmanishtha* and a *shrotriya* for a practical reason. A *brahmanishtha* is one who is in union with God, but one who is in such union may not always be in a position to teach, because of his transcendence of all means of communicating knowledge. He is above normal body-consciousness, above the empirical means of expression. And a mere *shrotriya* is like a *pundit* or scholar. Unless he is a *brahmanishtha*, he will not carry conviction when he teaches. Your teaching should carry weight and force. It should go into the hearts of the hearers. That is possible only if you live that knowledge yourself, and also you are in a position to expound it through language and diction.

Now, the Guru should have a double qualification. He must be living what he teaches, and also he should have the power to express what he knows. That is a *brahmanishtha* and a *shrotriya*, beautifully blended. Such a person is an *ananya*. You have no other alternative than this. You approach a Guru who is established in the knowledge which he has acquired, in whom knowledge has become a part of his being and life and practice, and who has also the blessing of the power of expression; otherwise, this truth cannot be known. This knowledge cannot be obtained through mere study for oneself, by private enterprise, merely. It requires the grace of a Master. Knowledge acquired through a Guru is living knowledge. It has a vitality about it, whereas the knowledge that you acquire merely by study of books is inert knowledge. It is like tinned food which has no life in it. There is a difference between a mango that is plucked from a tree and the mango that has been saturated in syrup in a tin for three years. Academic knowledge is also knowledge, but it cannot carry conviction and cannot transform your heart. What you gain through the Guru is full of living force and energy and vitality and power which the Guru conveys to the disciple through initiation, which is called the process *shaktipata*, by which the will of the Guru enters the mind of the disciple. The role that the Guru plays in the imparting of knowledge is not mean. No one should underestimate this process of initiation. It is a super-logical mystery, a super-scientific fact. The Upanishad confirms it. Wherever you see in the Upanishad a description of the imparting of knowledge, you find it has always been done through a

Guru to a disciple. Indra went to Prajapati for knowledge. Narada went to Sanatkumara for knowledge. Brahmanas who were well-versed in the scriptures, and great men in their own way, went humbly even to a Kshatriya king, with sacred firewood in their hands, with offerings, and without any superiority-feeling of their being in a higher order of society. The Kshatriya kings sometimes used to feel awkward and were placed in an embarrassing situation. The king would say, "I am a Kshatriya and I am not supposed to impart knowledge to you, Brahmanas." But these seekers used to say, "We have not come here as Brahmanas. We have come as humble students and aspirants of knowledge." The *Vaishvanara-Vidya* described in the Chhandogya Upanishad was given by a Kshatriya to learned Brahmanas. Where the question of knowledge and aspiration for God are concerned, class and social distinction do not count. Anyone can be a disciple of any superior. It is only knowledge that is expected and not social category. The Guru is most important and initiation very essential. This is what seems to be conveyed by this term '*ananya*' in the Upanishad. Subtle is this knowledge.

Now, what is knowledge? Why is it regarded as so subtle? The subtlety of it really lies in the fact that it is not an object of knowledge. Anything that is an object of our understanding or mind can be regarded as a gross presentation definable in character—spatial and temporal in its location, and causal in its connection. The whole world is a network of space, time and cause. Everything is somewhere in space. Everything is sometime in the passage of the temporal process of events, and everything is

connected with something else in a causal chain. Everything is a cause, and everything is an effect. This is the way we try to understand things. But this supreme mystery about which Nachiketas put the third question is not the cause of an effect. It does not produce anything. It is not also the effect of a cause. It has not been produced by anything. It is not located in a particular place. It is not spatial. It is not also temporal, because it is not there sometimes only in the passage of events. It is not anywhere, because it is everywhere, and that which is everywhere is something which cannot be defined by the mind. That which is indefinable is also unknowable to the mind, because knowledge given to the mind and the intellect is always in terms of definition. The definition need not necessarily be verbal or linguistic. There is a psychological definition of an object inwardly conducted when we begin to cognise it. A definition is an activity of the mind by which it apprehends the location of an object in a particular manner, and so indefinable things are also unknowable things. Inasmuch as reality is not spatial or temporal, and is not causally connected, it is not definable by logical characters, and therefore not capable of being known by the mind; not also capable of being judged by the intellectual categories. Well, we can understand why Yama refused to give an answer to this question of Nachiketas. How can you say anything about it to a poor boy from the mortal world, come in a state of sheer enthusiasm? Indra had to observe *brahmacharya* for more than a hundred years to receive this knowledge from Prajapati. Four times had he to go to Prajapati, and Prajapati would not impart this knowledge at

once. He gave a tentative explanation, and gradually instructed Indra after the latter underwent this penance of *brahmacharya*. Together with the insistence on the necessity of a Guru in the imparting of knowledge, the Upanishads are also never tired of hammering upon another qualification of the student of this knowledge—*brahmacharya*. In many places it appears that *brahmacharya* and Brahman are almost identified. Wherever there is *brahmacharya*, there is also Brahman-knowledge. Very significant is this word—*brahmacharya*. It is the conduct of Brahman that is actually called *brahmacharya*. *Charya* is conduct, behaviour, attitude, disposition, demeanour, and *brahma* is the Truth. The conduct of reality is *brahmacharya*. So, when you conduct yourself in a manner not in contradiction to the nature of Truth, you are supposed to be observing *brahmacharya*. And what is the nature of Truth which you should not contradict in your day-to-day conduct and which is supposed to be *brahmacharya*? The nature of Truth is non-sensory existence. Truth is not a sensible object. It is not seen, it is not heard, it is not tasted, it is not touched, it is not contacted by any of the senses of our individual personality. Therefore, to desire for the objects of sense would be a contradiction of the nature of Truth. *Brahmacharya* is sensory non-indulgence. The opposite of sensory indulgence is the attitude of *brahmacharya*. Our present-day activities are mostly a refutation of the principles of *brahmacharya*, and so we are weak in every respect. We are unable to see, unable to hear, unable to touch, unable to walk, unable to speak, unable to digest our

daily meal. Everything has been weakened, because our senses refute the existence of God. When you see an object you deny God, because the *denial* of God and the *perception* of an object are one and the same thing. When you hear a sound, you deny God. When you taste, when you touch, when you have any kind of sensory activity, there is an unconscious refutation of the indivisibility of the existence of God. *Brahmacharya* has thus been, by an extension of its meaning, regarded as sense-control. But sense-control is not the whole meaning of *brahmacharya*. It is a spiritual attitude to things that is called *brahmacharya*, which implies, of course, automatically, sense-control. When it is daylight, when the sun is up above our heads, it is understood that darkness has gone. But day is not merely the absence of darkness. It is a positive kind of enlivening and energising phenomenon, a power that we receive from the sun, including light. So, *brahmacharya* is not merely a withdrawal of the senses from contacts with objects, though it implies that, also. It is an inward positivity of attitude. In *brahmacharya*, you become a positive person, with a content of your own, independent of any kind of external aid. You have a stuff of your own, as they call it. That is *brahmacharya*. Many people become 'nobodies' when they retire from their offices. No one wants them afterwards, because they have no stuff of their own. Their only stuff was their office. Their importance was not intrinsic. The collector's importance, the minister's importance, the king's importance, the officer's importance, or the rich man's importance is not intrinsic, because when this value or the richness goes, he also loses his status and worth. Intrinsic

worth is a positivity that you acquire by a novel *sadhana* or practice, by which you feel filled with something even if nobody is to look at your face. Your joy, then, knows no bounds, even if the world does not want you anymore. You are not dependent upon it. And this positivity expresses itself outwardly as sense-control, self-restraint—*atma-vinigraha*. Thus, *brahmacharya* is an inward positivity of acquisition, and, also at the same time, a negative freedom from longing for objects of sense. It is with this qualification that one precisely approaches a Guru for knowledge. You do not suddenly get down from the back seat of your car and go to the Guru for knowledge. Very difficult! Now you understand why Yama was reluctant to speak.

Having guarded ourselves adequately with a knowledge of the difficulty of acquiring this mystery of mysteries in our experience, we try to understand what the Lord Yama, the great teacher of the Katha Upanishad, must have spoken as the final word to Nachiketas. Even when Yama comes to the main point in question, he does not hit it directly. He tries to approach it gradually. This is the technique of the teaching of any science or art. When you speak on any subject or teach a particular branch of learning, you should not forthwith go to the subject at the very beginning itself. That would be difficult for the student to comprehend. You must follow what they call the Socratic method of teaching. You speak as if you are on the level of the student, and assume a form of humility which immediately attracts the attention of the student. You take the standpoint of the student and not your own standpoint,

when you speak or teach. Immediately you attract the students. If you assume an importance and superiority of your own and speak as if you know a lot, then you are not a good psychologist, and you are not going to be a successful teacher in the school. A successful teacher is one who understands the student or the disciple, who takes the standpoint of the student and not his own, though he is driving the mind of the student to his own standpoint, finally. Yama follows this wonderful educational psychology of gradually moving towards the ultimate meaning of things, taking the mind of Nachiketas systematically from the lower to the higher, a process which is expressed in a few verses of the Katha Upanishad.

indriyebhyaḥ parā hyarthā arthebhyaśca param manaḥ;
manasaś ca parā buddhir buddher ātmā mahān paraḥ;
mahataḥ param avyaktam avyaktāt puruṣaḥ paraḥ;
puruṣān na paraṁ kiñcit sā kāṣṭhā, sā parā gatiḥ.

We have, in Indian logic, what is known as *arundhati-darshana-nyaya*. Arundhati is a star in the sky. It is a small star somewhere. Suppose I want to tell you or point out to you where that star is, I tell you, “There, you see a star,” you will not be able to decipher that star on account of there being many stars in the sky. You will say, “Which one are you pointing out?” So, what I do is to explain thus, “You look at that tree there, in front. Do you see that tree?” “Yes.” “Do you see a branch of that tree shooting to the Northern direction?” “Yes.” “Do you see a star directly at the top of that branch?” “Yes, I see. That is very correct.” “Do you see a star that is immediately to the right of that star?” “Yes.” “Do you see a small twinkle just near it? That

is Arundhati!" So, now, you understand where Arundhati is. If I had directly told you, "Here is Arundhati," you would not have understood me. This *arundhati-darshana-nyaya* is applied here by Yama. What do you see first of all? Yama tells Nachiketas, "What do you see?" "A world." "All right!" "Let us take the world as a stand for the sake of convenience of teaching for the present." But who knows this world? Who is the knower of this world? The senses are the knowers of the world. What do you mean by the knowledge of the world through the senses? The senses are in a position to gather information about the qualities of things outside, known as the world. How do the senses gather this information? By direct contact. They do not necessarily come in physical contact with the objects. For example, when I look at a tree, my senses do not come in physical contact, they are so many yards away from the physical object called the tree. So, by some other means do the senses come to have a knowledge of the object outside. They have a power, a capacity of their own, an endowment by which they can grasp the knowledge of an existent object outside even without physically coming in contact with that object. If the senses are feeble, the knowledge would be defective. If the senses are powerful, acute, if you have an eagle's sight, you will have a clear perception of things. And the senses, therefore, should be regarded as more important aspects in the process of the knowledge of an object than the object itself. But the senses are not the physical organs. The eyeballs are not the eyes. The eardrums are not the ears. The tongue is not the taste-principle. The nose is not what smells. The principle behind the sensory action, the

sensory cognition or perception, is different from the organ as such. You can open your eyes and yet see nothing if your mind is withdrawn. You may be concentrating your mind on something and hear not even a gunshot, because you have been fixing your mind on something else. The senses are not really the physical organs of action or perception. There are other things, beyond. These are called the *arthas* or rudimentary principles, known also as *tanmatras*, in Sanskrit, superior to the sensory powers, of which the sensory powers are constituted. From the world we have come to the senses, from the senses we have come to the powers that constitute the sensory powers. Beyond these is the mind, because, when the mind does not work, the senses also will not give us any kind of information. Suppose, the mind is out of order—what will happen? One will be seeing things but will not understand them. Yama says the mind is superior to the senses. Its importance is much more than that of the other instruments which are the senses, and even the location or the definitive character of an object outside. But, even if the mind is present and the intellect is not working, you will not have a correct judgement of things. You may look at an object like a cow or a sheep, which also see objects that you see. They have no proper judgement of the pros and cons of the perceptions of objects as a human being has. Therefore, the intellect should be regarded as superior to the mind.

Here we come to a halt, as it were, because of exhaustion of all our available resources. Beyond the intellect you know nothing. The intellect is known as *vijnanadhara* in Buddhist psychology. Buddhism has a

tremendous analysis of the nature of understanding. We regard understanding or intellectual comprehension not as a static act of consciousness from within but a process of momentary links which come one after another, like the pictures in a cinematographic projection. In a cinema, you do not see only a single picture. You see many pictures coming one after another. Yet it looks as if there is a stream flowing continuously, without a break. There is a jump or a break between every picture. You can see a film and see the distinction between one picture and the other, but the velocity of the film is such that it gives us the illusive perception of a continuity or flow, like the flow of the Ganga, we have before us. The psychology of Buddhism tells us that *vijnana* is a *dhara*, a successive flow of momentary discrete links which are really not connected with one another but which have the appearance of a continuity. Thus, the world is not made up of any continuity of objects. It is made up of a momentary linkage of forces. The world is momentary, *kshanika*, says Buddha. We say that the tree, for instance, is a solid or static object, a stone is static, a building is static. Not so, says the psychology. They appear to be static on account of a temporary conjunction or union of the condition of our knowing with the condition of the momentariness of objects. The temporary or momentary character of things is not known by the mind, and the mind mistakes momentariness for solidity and perpetuality due to a peculiar activity that takes place within us in correspondence with the momentary objects outside us. We do not really know what is happening within us. The

velocity or the speed of the movement of the mind sometimes comes in conjunction with, coincides with, is co-extensive with the condition of the momentariness of objects. And, because of this uniformity temporarily established, for the time being, between a type of momentariness of mental functions and a corresponding type of momentariness of the movement of objects outside, there appears before us a solid object, as it were, while the solid object does not really exist. Thus, intellectual knowledge cannot be regarded as real knowledge. It is an illusive information conveyed to us by the trick played by a joint action or connivance between the object and the senses. Yama says, this is not sufficient. There is something beyond the intellect.

There is a higher knowledge than the human understanding. That higher intelligence superior to human understanding is called *Mahat-tattva*, also called *Mahat*. Sometimes, in Vedantic parlance, you call it *Hiranyagarbha*. This Cosmic Intelligence is regarded as the totality of individual intelligences. This is the usual description of Cosmic Intelligence; but it is not a correct statement of fact. The Universal is not merely a totality of particulars. Many fools do not make one wise man. You know that even a thousand fools put together do not make one person of wisdom. Even all the individualities put together cannot make the Cosmic Mind. The *Mahat-tattva* or the Cosmic Intelligence is *qualitatively* different from the totality or the mathematical union of individual understandings. God's knowledge is not merely a total of human knowledge. It does not mean that if everybody

sneezes, God will have a big sneeze! He does not sneeze, though we all may. Quality marks the difference between *cosmic existence* and *individual process*. You cannot call individuality as existence at all. You can only call it a process, a becoming, and not being. Being is only the supreme state. The *Mahat* or Cosmic Intelligence is as much different from individual understanding in quality as waking knowledge is from the dreamer's perception. You cannot say that your knowledge in the waking life is only a totality of what is there in dream. It is qualitatively different and therefore you are happy even to be a beggar in the waking condition than a king in dream. The cosmic knowledge is qualitatively different from, that is, superior to, the human understanding. Yama says, *Mahat-atman* or *Hiranyagarbha* is a higher reality than human understanding, to which human nature points. Evolution is not over with human experience. Mankind is only a link in the process of a longer evolution. You have to move further, still, to the *Mahat*. But *Mahat* itself is not complete. The *Avyakta* is, yet, higher.

Avyakta is that inscrutable, indescribable precondition of the manifestation of all things, we call *prakriti, maya, avyakrita*, and so on, though all these terms do not convey a true meaning of what it is. The presupposition, the precondition, the necessity, the cause behind the expression of this Universe in its visible form is *avyakta*. Every effect must have a cause. If the Universe is to be regarded as an effect, logically speaking, there must be a cause thereof. This is the Seed of all things. And beyond this final Cause, is the Causeless Cause, the unmoved Mover, the *Purusha*.

Beyond the *Avyakta* is the *Purusha*. The *Purusha* is Supreme. What is this *Purusha*? *Purusha* is a term we apply to what truly *Is*, the Ultimate Existence. We cannot also call it existence; it is neither existence nor non-existence as we know it. It is not *sat* or being and *asat* or non-being, but beyond both. The *Purusha* is Consciousness, if at all we can define it in this manner. It is the Supreme Being, the Being of all beings, the Real of real, *Satyasya satyam*. It is not the cause of the universe; else, it would become temporal: therefore, it is supposed to be superior to the *Avyakta* which is the cause of all things. It is neither a cause nor an effect. We do not call it either way. We do not call it *sat*; we do not call it *asat*. We can know it only by being it. Therefore Yama said, it is difficult to teach it. How can you teach that which can be known only by being it? There is no teaching of it. There is no hearing about it. There is no knowing about it other than by actually experiencing it or realising it.

The Purusha is not reached by any kind of conceivable effort. We are coming to the nature of the difficulty in knowing it. We generally acquire things by effort of some kind. We exert towards the acquisition of objects, but an ordinary exertion or effort will not be of much avail in the acquisition of the knowledge of the *Purusha*. The *Purusha* is not someone or something, somewhere. The great commentator on the Vedanta texts, Acharya Shankara, says that you can reach a village or a city by moving along a road, but the *Purusha* is not a place, not a thing, not a person. How can you reach it by moving? You cannot sit on a vehicle or a chariot and drive towards it. There is no such

thing as *going* to it. There is no movement towards God, because existence and God are identical. How can you move towards existence, when you are included within it? Inasmuch as knowledge of the *Purusha* does not mean movement physically or spatially towards it, it has to be regarded as an *illumination* rather than an *acquisition*, as of a property. Knowledge of God is not a future event but an eternal fact of being. There is no past, present and future for it. It is eternity itself. It is *here* and *now*. How is it? I shall give you an example or an illustration to make you understand what it could be like. Suppose you dream that you are a butterfly. You are flying with two wings. You have lost consciousness of your being a man. You are no more a man. You have become a butterfly and you are flying from flower to flower, from place to place. Now, if you want to become a man, what should you do? Have you to jump from place to place or fly from one leaf to another leaf or go from one butterfly to another butterfly? What should you do to assume once again the nature of the humanity you have lost consciousness of? To become a man, the butterfly need not move from place to place. It need not even think of anyone. It need not *do* anything at all. It has to cease from being everything that it is, and simply reshuffle its consciousness. The butterfly-consciousness has to be re-organised, ordered in a given manner, and it is placed in man's consciousness. That is called waking. The moment this reshuffling of consciousness of the butterfly takes place, you are said to awake from the dream, and you say, "I am a man". Have you gone from one place to another place? You have not moved even an inch from where you were, and yet

you have become completely different from what you were. Likewise, man becoming God is not like moving in a jet plane or going to a seventh heaven, even as the butterfly becoming a man is not a movement from place to place. It is only a state of consciousness, changing its condition immediately, then and there, where it is, here itself. When you are shaken up, you become that just here, where you are seated. So, the *Purusha* who is beyond the *Mahat* and *Avyakta* is the eternal and the infinite which is hidden within the cave of your heartexistence itself—not to be reached by spatial or temporal movements or activities but by a methodology which is incapable of description. Nachiketas! Difficult it is to obtain this knowledge.

DISCOURSE NO. 4

The grand destination, this wondrous structure of the Universe, the goal of life is not easy of approach. The Upanishad cautions us:

uttiṣṭhata jāgrata;
prāpya varān nibodhata.

Do not be under the notion that you can get this blissful experience in a trice. Awake! Arise! Stop not till the goal is reached! Seek refuge with men of wisdom. Know it, then, by surrender to them.

kṣurasya dhārā niśitā duratyayā;
durgam pathas tat kavayo vadanti.

Subtle is this path, difficult is this way, hard it is to enter the citadel of this mysterious yoga. It is invisible, and hence hard in every sense of the term. If you can see the path, you can walk on it, but you cannot see the path of yoga. So, how will you tread it? This way of the Spirit is sometimes compared to the track of birds in the sky or of fish in water. You cannot see the track of birds in the sky, though they have a track of their own. You cannot see a beaten path struck in open space for birds to move on, nor can you see the track of fish in water. So is the path of knowledge. It cannot be seen, though it is there. It is difficult to know where one is being led to—there is no way to it. The Supreme *Purusha* who is beyond the *Avyakta* and the *Mahat* is not to be reached as we reach a city or a physical destination in this world. Inasmuch as there is no *reaching* or *attaining* to it in the physical sense, there is also no movement towards it; therefore there is no path leading to

it. Thus, the whole of the difficulty is placed before us. When there is no way to it, how will we attain it?

This problem of finding a means to the realisation of the goal becomes especially intense when we are not morally purified. It is the morally torpid mind that sees difficulties on the way. On this point, the Upanishad tells us,

naiṣā tarkeṇa matir āpaneyā.

By intellect or mere intelligence this goal cannot be reached. By mere human effort it is not to be attained. Sometimes it looks that the whole thing is absolutely impossible. Such a great Master as Dattatreya is supposed to have said in the very beginning of his Avadhuta-Gita,

Ishvaranugrahad eva pumsam advaita-vasana.

"By God's grace alone is the tendency towards the Absolute explicable." The great Acharya, Shankara, did not give a clear answer to the question, "How does this knowledge arise in the Jiva?" He merely said, "It is Ishvara's *Sankalpa*—grace of God." We have nothing else to say. The difficulty, the problem, the intensity of the hardship of the way is such that the less we say anything about it, the better it is for us. The turbid emotion cannot take to this path. Evil traits cannot approach this terrible mystery. One who is accustomed to unwanted ways in the world cannot take to the path of yoga. One who is a half-boiled personality from within, restless to the core, disturbed every moment even by the least occurrence outside, cannot take to this path. Any disturbance of any kind in any part of the personality of an individual will be a disqualification for

this path. Any type of agitation is to be avoided. We have agitations of various kinds in our personality. There is bodily disturbance, *pranic* disturbance, sensory, mental and intellectual disturbance. All these urges have to be subdued. This is described in a single word, 'self-control'. The Upanishad will tell us later on what self-control is.

nāvirato duścaritān nāśānto nāsamāhitaḥ
nāśānta-mānaso vāpi prajñānenainam āpnuyāt.

A mind which is not composed cannot hope to touch even the lowest pedestal of this practice. Here you have a very important point to consider. Are we fit to practise yoga? Each one has to answer this question for oneself. There is no use gaining entry into institutions of yoga by filling up a form and remitting five rupees of admission fee. Are you fit? How do you judge your fitness? The fitness does not consist merely in thinking that you have to gain admission into an ashram. The fitness does not consist in a feeling of defeatism, frustration and grief at home. Sorrows are not necessarily the only qualification for aspiring after the goal of yoga. Yoga is the most positive of truths. Any negative pre-condition cannot become a qualification for its practice. Quarrels at home, demotions in office, loss of property, death of children, cannot become qualifications for yoga. But most people are qualified only in this way. That is the reason why they have no peace of mind even though they sit before a great saint. They come with an internal disturbance, sit before holy audiences with a disturbed mind, and also sit with no clear notion as to the goal. A composed personality is the qualified aspirant for the yoga of the Upanishad, or any kind of yoga, for the

matter of that. The composure of personality consists in many forms of our conduct and behaviour. Self-assertion of any kind becomes a disqualification. None of us is free from this ailment called self-affirmation. We stick to our guns in every kind of argument and discussion. We always agree to differ. There is a pleasure felt within when we disagree with others, when we assert that the opinions that we hold are real and right. May it be pointed out that no point of view can be called absolutely correct. It is therefore futile and foolish on the part of any person to stick to one's own opinion wholly and unconditionally, without giving any credit to the opinions or feelings of others. If others may be untrue, you yourself are no better. All points of view are expressions of aspects of the manifestation of truth. Every expression of it is true in its own way. The disturbances within our personalities are mostly due to our disagreement with the circumstances outside. We hate conditions now prevailing in the world. We hate persons who do not think as we think. We have a thorough resentment in respect of every event that takes place, which is not conducive to the pleasure of our physical personality.

This resentment is sometimes expressed in speech and action, but oftentimes it is hidden in the mind itself. We are always in a state of resentment. We have a mood of our own, which is not compatible with inner satisfaction, not conducive also to the pleasure or the good of other people. We put on what Swami Sivanandaji Maharaj used to call a castor oil face, always. We are not pleased. We are never pleased with anything. There is always a complaint regarding every thing that happens anywhere in the world.

If it rains, we complain, “Oh, it is raining!” If it burns hot, we say, “Oh, the hell, how hot it is!” You cannot go forward, you cannot go backward, you cannot speak low, you cannot speak loud. Whatever you do is subject to criticism. This is a subtle mischief which the personality plays to defeat our purposes, so that we may remain where we are. It is said in a biblical context that Satan asked God, “Father, when will I have salvation?” Because Satan was damned to hell, it appears that God’s reply was, “When people will resist your temptations, you shall have freedom.” So it is said that Satan weeps whenever we fall into his temptations. “Oh, I have no hope, because people have fallen into the temptations which I have spread before them.” Satan’s work is to spread the net of temptation all around us, and his salvation seems to consist in our resisting it by knowing it, by being vigilant about it. But it is unfortunate that the world as a whole is a temptation before us, and this field of temptation that we call the world is itself also a field of training for us, because temptations are also lessons. And this Satan’s force does not work only from outside. It has a place in our intellects. The central stronghold or fortress of the activity of Satan is the intellect of the human individual. Your rise or fall depends upon how you understand things. In the Mahabharata we have a passage:

na devā yaṣṭim ādāya rakṣanti paśupālavat,
yaṁ tu rakṣitum icchanti buddhyā saṁvibhajanti tam.

“If the gods want to help us, they do not stand by us with a stick in their hands like a shepherd protecting his sheep. The blessings from the heavens come to us when our

intellects are rightly directed." And, a curse is nothing but a misdirection of the understanding. When we cannot think rightly, that is the worst thing that can befall us. The assumptions of our personality may be regarded as the main obstacle to yoga. Our whole life is one of preconceived ideas. We are not and we cannot be free from these weaknesses, irrespective of our learning and our pedigree, etc. because this defect is ingrained in the very root of our personality. We are born with it. Perhaps this is what they call the original sin which is born with us, that with which we are born into this world and which is the limitation of our very being itself. 'Likes' and 'dislikes' are the common terms used to describe this defect in us. Misconception, wrong understanding, not knowing the truth of things before us is designated as *ajnana*, which is supposed to breed *aviveka* or the mistaking of one thing for another thing. *Aviveka* gives rise to *ahamkara* or egoism, the sense of importance of one's own self. Due to *ahamkara* there is the rise of *raga* and *dvesha*, or love and hatred. This pair, love and hate, like and dislike, breeds action, *karma*, of a selfish character, to gain what is wanted and to avoid what is not wanted. This *karma*, this selfish action, gives rise to future births and deaths in a series of transmigratory lives. This is the sorrow of life. This is called the chain or the linkage of the bondage of the individual.

The subdual of these impulses from within, leading us the wrong way, is called self-control. This is symbolically and picturesquely described in a passage of the Katha Upanishad. Here we have a presentation of the entire

process of self-control, the pre-condition to the higher practices of yoga.

Our soul within may be compared to the Lord seated in a chariot. This body of ours, this individuality, this personality, may be regarded as a chariot in which is seated the soul- consciousness. The chariot is driven by a charioteer, a driver. The intellect in us is the charioteer. The reins are the operations of the mind. The horses which pull or drag this chariot are the senses—the eyes, ears, etc. The roads along which this chariot is driven by the charioteer with the help of the horses are the objects of the senses. All this is made possible by a joint activity of the Atman, the senses and the mind. This is a very concise and beautiful description, symbolic, dramatic, full of meaning and profundity. This chariot is to be driven right to the Abode of Vishnu—*tad vishnoh paramam padam*. If the horses are restive, if they are tired, if they are unwilling, if they cannot see the road properly, they may dash down the chariot into a ditch. Sometimes, we see horses dragging *tongas* and going backwards! They will not go forward. Then the *tongawalla* gets down and catches hold of the reins. Either the horses are exhausted, or they are annoyed. Sometimes, these horses of our senses behave in this manner.

The chariot is also to be made of good material; otherwise it may get disintegrated by wear and tear of movement. The charioteer plays the most important part in this entire activity of the locomotion of the chariot. You know the role Sri Krishna played in driving the chariot of Arjuna. Everything was dependent on him. The driver of a car, even in your own case, is very important. You sit in the

car comfortably, and doze there, but what is the responsibility of the driver? Your life is in his hands. If he also starts dozing, what will happen? So, the charioteer, the intellect, the understanding, the rationality in us is the primeval faculty which determines the extent of our progress in this effort, called the practice of yoga. Look at the various aspects of this movement of the chariot described in this passage. The roads are the objects of sense. The senses are the horses. The intellect is the charioteer. The rider is the soul. The body is the chariot. Everything is very essential. There is no unimportant part in this description.

The chariot may be considered first and foremost. What should be the nature of the chariot? It should be strongly built—*na ayam atma balahinena labhyah*. A weakling cannot attain to this Atman. Now, the strength or the *bala* that is demanded of the aspirant is not an elephantine strength of the muscles and the bones merely; otherwise, elephants would be the best seekers of yoga. What is required of a seeker is the strength of integrity and character. You should be sufficiently tough in your physical build also, though you need not be a *sandow*. Strength of the body is different from bulkiness of personality or the heaviness of the body. It is the capacity to endure hardship—that is called strength. To what extent can you bear the pairs of opposites? From that you can know the strength of your personality. Now, the personality is not merely the body. This body that is described as the chariot in the Upanishad is not simply the physical body, but the entire vesture of the personality, the *pancha- koshas*—

annamaya, pranamaya, manomaya, vijnanamaya, and *anandamaya.* All this is the chariot described in the Upanishad. These layers have to be kept in unison and should be made of very hard timber. Also, the parts of the chariot should be well and harmoniously adjusted. Suppose one wheel moves this way and the other wheel moves that way, they are loosely connected; then, there would be no proper motion of the chariot. It should not be shaky. It should be systematically built, harmoniously constructed, strong in its make and fit to bear the wear and tear of the motion towards the ultimate goal of life. For this purpose, we have to observe what we call the *golden mean* of conduct, which is beautifully described in the sixth chapter of the Bhagavadgita. Moderation in our conduct, balance in our behaviour, harmony in our activity, is a pre-condition to yoga.

Extreme of any kind is opposed to yoga. Yoga is the course *via media*, the *madhyama-marga* in every type of engagement, physically, verbally as well as mentally. In our behaviour we must be moderate. We should not be excessive in our behaviour with others or with our own selves. When we talk, we should not talk the head off a person, as if the lid is open—go on talking until the man is tired and wants to get away. This is a weakness. Speak what is necessary. Speak in proper terms. Speak in the proper mood, and speak at the proper time, in a proper manner. Then you will succeed in your aims. You should not tell the wrong thing, at a wrong time, in a wrong manner. Nor should you be in an agitated mood when you speak, with curled lips and red eyes. Let not the mind be agitated when

you express yourself in action or speech. All this is a part of the composure of personality. It is only in this composed nature that we can say the right charioteer is seated. The chariot of Arjuna was very peculiarly made. It was protected by Hanuman on the top, Krishna in the front as well as the blessing of the Lord of Fire, Agnideva, who presented Arjuna with the Gandiva bow. It had blessings of various kinds. If you read the Mahabharata, you will know it. On such a chariot was Arjuna seated, the best of archers, with the best of charioteers endowed with the highest wisdom and power. This is described to some extent in the Katha Upanishad itself, in certain other contexts as well.

The objects of sense are regarded as the roads along which the chariot is driven. This is something very curious. How are we to drive this chariot along the objects of sense? Can you say that the objects are the way to the goal of our life? Yes. The world is the field of training in yoga. The objects have to become aids in our practice rather than oppositions to our effort. In one particular school of yoga, called *tantra*, there is a strange principle followed; the principle being that the things by which you fall, by those very things you shall rise—*yair eva patanam dravyaih siddhis taireva.* That which can kill you can also make you alive if it is properly administered. This is something like the homeopathic system of medicine. The yoga of the Upanishad is a very healthy way of approach to the objects of sense and the world as a whole. You know the hymns of the Samhitas of the Vedas look upon the world as a manifestation of God's glory and abundance. The rise of the sun in the east, the fall of rain from the skies, the luminosity

of the moon, the dawn, the sunset—all these were objects of praise for the *rishis* of the Vedas. They were manifestations of God's majesty. Positive was the approach of the Vedic seers. They had nothing of the negative in their approach to God. The Upanishads, being the concluding portions of these exquisite outpourings of the Vedas, give us the quintessence of the positive approach to life. If you read all the major Upanishads attentively, you will see that their approach is marvellous. They take you from one state of joy to another state of joy, from *ananda* to *ananda*. Every level of experience is a state of delight for the Upanishads. There is no sorrow, grief or negativity there. The objects of sense appear as impediments on account of our wrong approach to them. Your own son can become your enemy if you do not properly behave with him. Your own husband or wife can be your opponent if there is maladjustment with him or her. We have no friends, even as we have no enemies in this world. Whether one is a friend or an enemy depends on how we conduct ourselves with others. There is no such thing as an intrinsic friend or an intrinsic enemy. Such things do not exist. We can create a friend or an enemy, if we like, according to our predilections. Even in our own families, in our own blood-relations, we can have friends as well as foes. Father and son fight cases in courts because of an erroneous adjustment between themselves, psychologically. The objects of sense are our enemies when we conduct ourselves wrongly with them. They become friends when our understanding of them is perfect. Even snakes are charmed and controlled by snake-charmers.

Even lions are tamed. What to say of other objects in the world!

The yoga of the Katha Upanishad, which regards objects of sense as roads along which the chariot of the personality has to be driven holds the world as an aid in the practice of yoga. Forces of nature are friends of the practicant. They also become temptations in the earlier stages. The various grand manifestations which come to distract the attention of the practicant of yoga, which we hear of in the Puranas and Epics—Rambha, Urvasi, Indra and such other persons coming and obstructing the path—all these are the reactions set up by the forces of nature, forming also the ingredients of our own personalities. The world outside and the body within are made up of the same stuff. There is a similarity of character and quality between both. This is the reason why we are unable to avoid the perception of the world. It is ingrained within us, being a part of our life. It is with us, and in us. But the world can be an obstacle even as, as mentioned in the sixth chapter of the Bhagavadgita, God Himself can be an obstacle to us when we do not obey His laws or do not understand Him. The Atman is regarded both as a friend and a foe.

ātmaiva hyātmano bandhur ātmaiva ripur ātmanaḥ.

The Atman is your friend. The Atman also is your enemy. How could Atman be an enemy? But so says Bhagavan Sri Krishna. All law is a terror when we do not want to obey it. But law is a protector when we participate in its requirements. The world is the law of God. The principle of Reality, as *Rita*, manifests itself as this creation.

God speaks to us through the various things of the world. He smiles at us through all things. He also frowns at us when occasion demands. The myriad objects, colours and sounds that we see in the world are the various ways in which we confront God in our daily life. These are the lessons God imparts to us through his *Virat-Svarupa*—Cosmic Form. When we gaze, we gaze at the face of God. There are no objects of sense. They do not exist. When the senses behave in a manner of their own, when the Spirit within us gets externalised through the activity of the senses, it appears as objects. The objects are nothing but Spirit, projected in space and time. God sensualised is the world. The Absolute spatialised and temporalised is this creation. There is no separate world. There is no separate creation. There are no separate objects of sense. They are only names that we have given to the very same truths that we are going to realise ultimately through the practice of yoga. We detest the world as we hang a dog by calling it a bad name. We curse the world because we see it differently from what it is. The objects of sense, according to this Upanishad, are the roads for our movement towards Godhood, which means to say that we have neither to be repelled by them nor to be attracted by them. The world should neither tempt us nor reject us. Neither should we shun the world nor should the world shun us. This point is emphasised in the twelfth chapter of the Bhagavadgita, also. Very difficult, indeed, is this attitude to be developed. You should not shrink away from things, and you should also not conduct yourself in such a way that the world shrinks away from you. This itself is yoga, and this is possible only

when the goal is clear before our eyes. Many of us, seekers, aspirants, have not the goal of our life clearly pictured before our minds. We do not know whether we have to realise God first, or serve the world first, to give you only one instance of our quandary and problem. Many seekers think that service of humanity is to come first, and realisation of God afterwards. Sometimes we think that mankind itself is God, and service of man is service of God, and so we begin to identify the goal of our life with the activities of our daily life. This is a wonderful peculiarity of our attitude by which the goal can be interpreted in a dexterous fashion, so that we appear to be pursuing the goal while we are actually pursuing what is pleasant to the deeper needs of this bodily and ego-ridden personality. No one, ordinarily speaking, can aspire for God wholly. It is impossible to truly aspire for God from the entirety of our being. Though we may all regard ourselves as aspirants after God, it is impossible to wholly think of God or love God, because there are other presentations before us which can take the place of God and make us mistake them for God, interpret them as God, put the cart before the horse, and define our conduct and behaviour in a way that appeals to mankind and the world. Many a time we judge our progress from the admirations that we receive from people. If the whole world proclaims you as great, you think that you are progressing in the path of yoga. If all the newspapers publicise you as the leader of mankind, you have a feeling, perhaps, that you are on the right path. Otherwise, why should all people adulate you? "The world regards me, loves me, adores me, publicises me; this means

God is blessing me; God's grace is upon me." You can think like that, but to understand what God is and what love of God is, God's grace alone is necessary. The Guru has to bless you. It requires much effort.

The concept of God, the notion of the goal of life before us, is the ultimate determining factor in the success of our practice of yoga, and the Kathopanishad, in this passage on self-control—*atmanam rathinam viddhi*, etc.—makes it clear that this chariot of the body can go hither and thither if the charioteer lets loose the reins and allows the horses to move according to their whims and fancies. Our intellect can be blurred and clouded by the force exerted upon it by the senses. The senses are very powerful and their power is such that their activities can produce an impact on the mind and the intellect to such an extent that the mind can think and the intellect can understand things only in terms of the senses. The Upanishad warns us against this fall. The Atman, the mind and the senses should be in unison—*atmendriyamanoyukta*. They should not work in their own way, independently. That is, the activity of the senses, the thoughts of the mind and the needs of the Spirit should be in conformity with one another. They should not be at variance with each other. How is this possible? This is precisely the practice involved in yoga. Yoga is nothing but the conformity of the Spirit, the mind and the senses, together. The perceptions of the senses, the thoughts of the mind and the characteristics of the Spirit should coincide. What are the characteristics of the Spirit? Indivisibility of substance, universality of character, non-objectivity of nature, intelligence and subjectivity as different from

externality or objectivity are the essential features of the supreme Spirit, which should influence the thoughts of the mind and the activities of the senses. This is the foundation of the *karma* yoga of the Bhagavad-Gita. *Karma* yoga or spiritualised activity is that conduct of life externally, which is guided by the nature of the Atman within and not directed by the desires of the senses.

The Atman wants nothing. It has known everything. Therefore to desire anything through our actions will be contrary to the requirements of the Atman. While there is nothing wrong with action as such, there is something seriously wrong with action done with a motive behind it, because the Atman has no motive. So, if the Atman is to be the basis of our actions, the goal of our deeds and works, naturally, they should not be directed to an ulterior purpose other than the Atman itself. Though the actions are directed outwardly, their aim is the inward realisation of the Atman. Wonderful is this yoga! The movement is outward through action, but the goal is inward which is the Self. Though you are running outward, you are actually moving inward. That is *karma* yoga. It looks as if you are working in a spatial world, externally directed towards other persons and things, but you are really converging to the point of the Atman that is present hiddenly in the objects. The Atman is not merely within. It is also without. The Atman has, really, no within and without. When it is said that the Atman is also without, and it is this Atman without that is pursued by the activities through *karma* yoga, what we mean is that whether you run forward, backward, inward or outward into the world of objects, you

are directed to the same point. Extremes meet at the same focus. Geometricians tell us that parallel lines also can meet at infinity. Parallel lines, generally, do not meet, but it is said that they can meet if they are stretched to infinitude. The expert performance of *karma* yoga is identical with the expert meditation on the Absolute. But it should be *expert*. This is the crucial issue about it. This is the condition to be underlined. When you move to the Infinite outwardly, you reach also the Infinite which is inward. This yoga of the Katha Upanishad is not *jnana* yoga; it is not *bhakti* yoga; it is not *karma* yoga; it is not any kind of known yoga. It is the yoga of the Infinite, the secret way, of which these are aspects. The so-called yogas known as *karma*, *bhakti*, *jnana*, etc. are ramifications of this mysterious technique which Yama describes to Nachiketas.

DISCOURSE NO. 5

The path of the soul to its supreme destination is explained in the Katha Upanishad through a description of the chariot of the body. How does this chariot move? What is the methodology involved in the progress of the individual to its goal? This inner process of the movement of the individual to the Absolute is what we know as the practice of *sadhana*, or yoga. While there are elaborate textbooks on this subject, the Upanishad touches upon the point in a single mantra, as follows:

yacched vāṅ manasī prājñas tad yacchej, etc.

The way of yoga is a process of gradual ascent and illumination. It is also a systematised process of achieving freedom by stages. Our bondage is not of a uniform character. The way in which we are tied down to mortal experience is a complicated structure. You are not tied with one rope to a single peg, as a cow is tied, for example. The bondage of *samsara* is of a different nature from the way in which we usually understand bondage or suffering to be. Our sufferings are very peculiar. Because of the peculiarity of this suffering of ours, we sometimes do not know that we are suffering. There are people who will be ill for years together and be accustomed to that sort of life. That itself becomes a normality for them. In the beginning, it comes like an inconvenience. Later on, it is a natural life. Aeons must have passed since we have entered this plane of *samsara*. We have passed through various kinds of birth. We have moved through different species and organisms, and are said to have now reached this level of the human

being. We have had experiences in every kind of life that we lived, and all these experiences were peculiar to the particular species into which we were born. But, rarely do we realise that life can be a bondage. We, as human beings, today living in this world, this earth plane, at this moment of time, do not consider the fact of the bondage involved in our life. Are we always conscious that we are bound, or are in an unfortunate state of existence? We have occasions for rejoicing, exultation and delights of various kinds. Life is a pleasure to most people, and the bitterness that is hidden beneath it comes to the surface only occasionally, under certain circumstances. Our consciousness gets accustomed to conditions of experience to which we are habituated. This habituation of the consciousness to certain states is the reason why we mistake pain for pleasure. The life of a human being—life in general, for the matter of that—is an involvement of such a complicated nature that our ignorance of it is indeed very serious. To regard this ignorance itself as a source of enjoyment is the worst that can befall a created being.

This is what is known as *avidya*—nescience. *Avidya*, ignorance, does not necessarily mean oblivion or total torpidity of mind. The ignorance in which we are shrouded is not an abolition of all understanding or mentation. It is something worse than that. It is not a sleepy state of the mind where it knows nothing at all, but it is a positive error of perception. One thing is mistaken for another, and that another which is erroneously superimposed on what actually is, is regarded as reality. The impermanent, transient, momentary structure of the universe is mistaken

for a permanent, stable abode of enjoyment. This is one form of ignorance, because it contradicts Truth. The bodily encasement, the physical personality, the social circumstances under which we live, are all considered by us as sources of pleasure, and our body itself is worshipped as an object of beauty, a piece of art which we daily look at in the mirror, if possible; and we embellish it in every possible manner, not knowing what it is really made of. The experiences of our life are not really pleasurable. The conditions through which we pass in mind and intellect from morning to evening are not ones of happiness; but we try to make the best of this suffering itself, and we try to create a heaven out of hell. This is to mistake pain for pleasure. And the greatest error which tops all the list is the mistaking of the non-Atman for the Atman, the object for the subject, the external for the Universal, the perishable for the permanent, the material for the conscious. This is, truly speaking, the state in which we are. From this kind of bondage, which is of such a difficult make-up, we have to free ourselves, step by step. This is the aim of yoga. From ignorance and its offshoots we have to gain freedom, and simultaneously gain mastery over our own self.

Bondage is not only dependence on the non-Atman but also forgetfulness of the nature of the Atman, at the same time. The consciousness of the object necessitates a forgetfulness of the subject in some proportion. As a matter of fact, the awareness of the existence of anything outside is due to a transference of a part of our consciousness to the object outside. All perception is an extroverted operation of consciousness. The awareness of an object, the knowledge

that we have of things outside, is a form of the operation of our consciousness within in terms of what is outside. We are aware of the existence of a world on account of our being in a state of motion towards the conditions of externality. This is why human life is to be regarded as a state of *becoming*, rather than *being*. Life is considered as a process of transiency by masters like the Buddha. They never considered the world as ultimately existent. Nothing in the world *is*. Everything *passes*. Everything moves. Even our awareness of the existence of the world is a process, a transitory condition of the activities of the mind, due to which we are said to be living in perpetual *anityata*, perishability, changefulness and an urge towards something beyond at every stage in which we are. There is a perpetual asking for the 'more' in us. We ask for *more* and *more*, endlessly—we do not reach an end of it. One of the philosophers of the West, William James, called this process the philosophy of the *more*. The whole life of man is nothing but an asking for the more. Whatever is supplied to you is inadequate for your purpose. If you become the ruler of the earth, you would like to become the ruler of the sky, and so on. This is because there is a tendency in us to move beyond the limited self, to overstep the boundary of the body and mind, to break through all bondage, and to reach that which we seem to have lost and of which we have at present no knowledge whatsoever. Our bondage is of such a nature that we do not know what type of bondage it is. It is like a sick man not knowing what ailment he is suffering from. Bondage becomes real when its nature is not known. A real thief is one who is never caught at any

time. A thief who is caught is not a good thief! Likewise, when you know what sort of bondage you are in, you are not in bondage. You have already overcome it to some extent. But we are in it right up to our necks. We are not only in it, but are also deprived of the knowledge of what has happened to us. This is *samsara* in its quintessence.

The difficulty of the practice of yoga, the way of the Spirit, lies in this central enigma of our not having any knowledge of what has befallen us, where we stand actually at this present moment, and what is required of us for our true freedom. There are several layers of our bondage. The bondage is not only external, but also internal. It is woven into our texture like a carpet that is knit with various layers of thread. It is wide, and also thick. If you remove one layer, you will find another layer underneath it. There is an organic complication, as it were, in the bondage which is part of us. The practice of yoga is, thus, not a straight movement towards a given point or a target in front of us. It is a winding process, sometimes a circular motion, occasionally with forward and backward steps, and with ascents and descents. It is like entry into the *chakravyuha*, the impregnable fortress described in the Mahabharata. One does not know how to enter it, and if anyone enters it, he does not know how to come out of it. Such is the difficulty involved in the practice of the path of the Spirit, the way of the Atman.

The bondage understood, we shake up our being from the mire of ignorance, and we place the first step on the initial rung of yoga. The hundreds of implications in this woven structure of human bondage are difficult to describe

in an 'open-book' fashion. We shall confine ourselves to the aspects that are touched upon by the Upanishad, in this context.

The first step, according to the Upanishad, in the mantra cited, is a withdrawal of the senses, such as speech, etc.—all the senses of knowledge and action—into the mind. But this is not all. The instruction goes further. The mind has to be settled in the intellect *(jnana-atman)*. The intellect is then to be set in tune with the Cosmic Intelligence (*Mahat-atman*). This Cosmic Function should get settled in Cosmic Being *(Shanta-atman)*. Here, Being, Consciousness, Freedom, Bliss are all one, indivisible essence *(Akhanda-Ekarasa- Satchidananda).*

yadā pañcāvatiṣṭhante jñānāni manasā saha,
buddhiś ca na viceṣṭati, tām āhuḥ paramāṃ gatim.

The intelligent one, the discriminative seeker, should introvert the senses in such a way that they stand in unison with the substance of the mind. The mind and the senses, though they work in collaboration with each other, are not identical in their function. The difference in their activities lies in the fact that while the mind can contemplate spatial and temporal objects independently of the functions of the senses, the senses require space and time and externality for their activity. Also, they cannot work unless the mind is actively associated with them. There is a speciality in the working of the senses, the speciality being that they cannot move inward to the subjective centre, but are always accustomed to move outward to the object. So you will never be able to make them contemplate themselves or meditate upon the source on which they have their very

being. The senses are the forms of the mind itself. We may say, to give a working example, the senses are to the mind what the rays are to the sun or the light of the sun. The analogy is not complete, but there is some similarity in this illustration. As there is a jetting forth of rays from the orb of the sun, there is a projection of force from the psychological organ, the *antahkarana*, in the form of sensory activity. The mind itself becomes the senses when it contacts objects. The senses are the mind thinking external forms. So, the first step, according to this mantra of the Upanishad, in the practice of yoga, is the attempt on the part of the seeker to block the avenues of the senses, so that the mind is not channelised towards objects but stands self-controlled, self-subdued and centred in itself. The five senses mingle with the mind in a blend of unified function; the intellect does not flicker with desire or distraction; there is a feeling of *wholeness*, then, in oneself. This is the yoga of meditation.

Our energies get depleted through sensory activity. This is something well known to us. Our strength does not depend upon what we eat, merely. It depends upon something else.

na prāṇena nāpānena martyo jīvati kaś cana
itareṇa tu jīvanti, yasminn etāv upāśritau.

Our life does not depend merely on the breathing process of *prana* and *apana*. It depends on something else, from which even the *prana* and *apana* rise. The intake of diet is, indeed, very important for the maintenance of health, but health does not rest on food alone, because everything can be thrown out of order if the mind is upset,

in spite of the taking in of the best form of diet. A shock that is injected into the mind is enough to disturb the entire balance of the personality, notwithstanding the fact that one has every amenity possible. The energy of the individual is in the individual himself. Your strength is in *you*. It is not outside you. The weakness of the personality, or the weakness of the body, is not due so much to physical contact with objects as to an erroneous adjustment that we make with the conditions of the world outside. All our suffering can ultimately be boiled down to an error of understanding, wrong knowledge. Just as we do not understand our own self, we also do not understand others. As a matter of fact, that we do not understand others properly follows from our not understanding our own self. A misjudgement of our own self implies a misjudgement of everything else also, because perceptions are emanations of our own consciousness. The *sadhaka*, or the seeker of Truth, should be confident that all that he needs will be provided to him by the very laws of existence. It is law that supplies you with strength, not the discrete objects of sense. Obedience to law is at once an acquisition of power, because law protects. The Upanishad, therefore, tells us that the senses which are powers of the mind, moving towards objects outside, should be sublimated into the mind itself. They should melt into the substance of the mind, so that they become the mind itself. This is *pratyahara*, sense-abstraction, described also in one of the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali. When Patanjali defines *pratyahara*, he says that it is nothing but the standing together of the senses with the mind, which is what the Katha Upanishad also says.

Yoga is the rise of consciousness from the lower to the higher degree of reality, by stages. The universe evolves by stages, and yoga is a process of the reversal of the diversifying creative activity of the universe. If creation is the coming out of an effect from the cause, yoga is a movement of the effect towards the cause, a recession of the particular into the universal, in greater and greater degrees. The effects have to be understood in order that we may know what their causes are. Also, in this attempt of the effect towards its cause, it should not try to jump to the third or the fourth level, or the ultimate level, at once. In yoga, there is no double promotion. You have to pass through every stage, though due to the intensity of the practice it may appear that you have achieved the goal at once, in a short time. How this happens is sometimes illustrated by a homely example. Suppose you have one thousand petals of lotus, kept one over the other. You pass a needle through them. How much time would the needle take to pierce through the thousand petals kept one over the other? The needle will come out immediately. Though the act of the passing of the needle looks immediate, it has passed through every petal, one after the other. It has not suddenly pierced through the petals, at one stroke, without any passage of time involved. Similarly, advanced *sadhakas*, seekers of a high order, may seem to have achieved success quickly, sometimes even in a few days. But they have to pass through all the stages, without omission. The stages, primarily, are those of the objects of sense, the senses, the mind, the intellect, the *Mahat-tattva*, and the Supreme Atman, or the *Paramatman*.

While the raw material of sensory operation may be said to be what we call the mind, the intellect is superior to it in the sense that it has a greater power of judgement. The mind is more instinctive, the intellect more ratiocinative. The mind is a bundle of instinctive stimuli that are invoked into ourselves in respect of things outside. But the intellect is superior, because it does not act merely on stimulus or instinctive urge, but understands things by a consideration of the pros and cons of a given situation. This means to say that our activities, whatever they be, should be an outcome of understanding and not mere instinctive reaction. This is a higher step in the practice of yoga. Never act without understanding the total involvement of any step or action. We are used to go headlong in a particular direction, not thinking properly as to what we are doing. The Bhagavadgita gives us a warning about this matter, in its eighteenth chapter. Action is not a simple movement of the mind towards its target. It is an involved process. The whole of our life is an involvement, as we observed earlier. It is not a movement along a beaten track, where we can walk by closing our eyes. It is an involved process, and therefore we have to keep ourselves vigilant always, even when we take a single step. Action should be based on understanding—then life becomes yoga. Otherwise, life is a bondage. The verse of the Bhagavadgita in this connection is this:

adhiṣṭhānaṁ tathā karta karaṇaṁ ca pṛthag-vidham
vividhāś ca pṛthak ceṣṭā daivaṁ caivātra pañcamam.

You are not the only conditioning factor of your actions. Do not say, "Everything depends on me; I shall do

it in this way”. Everything does not depend upon you, unfortunately. The action that you perform is not conditioned merely by what you think at that moment of time. This is why we are caught by our own actions. While we are under the impression that good will follow as an outcome of a particular deed of ours, suffering becomes the consequence, and then we beat our breasts and weep silently. No one can understand all the implications of an action. This verse of the Gita points out that several personal and super-personal factors contribute to the character of an action, and these, together, determine the result thereof. As fire is covered with smoke, all initiatives that we take in life are stifled by an ignorance of their involvements and implications. The bodily condition, the fitness of the personality, the nature of the mind and the character of the motive behind the action, the powers of the senses at that given moment of time, the various aspects of even a single action that we are going to undertake, and, above all, the centrality of the factor of a universal reality operating behind every action—all these are the conditioning factors of action.

The ultimate principle determining everything is the universal law—providence working. Human effort, while it is very essential, is not all. It becomes successful only when all these different elements are borne in mind. This is enlivened, illumined, conscious, deliberately directed activity—activity based on right understanding. This is a higher step than merely the work of the withdrawal of the sense into the mind. This is the state of *dhyana* or meditation in practical life. The first stage described in the

mantra of the Upanishad corresponds to *pratyahara* or abstraction, and *dharana* or concentration, the fixing of the understanding, the *vijnana* or the *buddhi*, corresponds to *dhyana* or meditation. But meditation here is directed to a higher end.

This is the beginning of spirituality in the proper sense of the term. Up to this time, it has only been a preparation for it. Virtuous deeds, good actions, moral conduct are all an introductory necessity in the practice of the higher yoga. The spiritual element in the practice comes into relief when the intellect, the *buddhi* or the *jnana-atman*, is attuned to the *Mahat-atman* or the Universal Intelligence. This is not an easy affair, but this is, precisely, meditation proper. The attunement of the intellect to the *Mahat*, the establishment of the *jnana-atman* in the *Mahat-atman* is possible only when we have an adequate understanding as to what this *Mahat-atman* is. We hear of this term '*Mahat*' several times in the Sankhya, and also in the Vedanta. It is said that *Mahat* comes out of *prakriti* and the *Mahat* is superior to the individual intellect, and so on. But what is this *Mahat*? What is our relation to it? What are we supposed to do about it, especially in our spiritual practices?

The *Mahat* is the great, the large, or the big, literally translated. But what is this largeness or the bigness or the vastness of it? The largeness of the *Mahat* consists in the fact that it is inclusive of all other particular units which go to constitute it. The *Mahat* is the ocean, while the *buddhi* is a drop in the ocean. As many drops make the ocean, we may say that all the intellects constitute the *Mahat* in its completeness. So, if the intellect or the *Mahat* in its

individual form is to stabilise itself in its own nature, if the *jnana-atman* is to unite itself with the *Mahat-atman*, the drop has to understand its relation to the ocean. For the *jnana-atman* to contemplate the *Mahat-atman*, the intellect has to rise to the Universal. The prerequisite is to understand its relation to the latter. If the drop is to meditate upon the ocean, supposing that the drop has consciousness of its own, what would be required of it? What has the drop to think when it meditates on the ocean? You know very well what the drop would think in the ocean in order that it may contemplate the ocean. What is the relationship between the drop and the ocean? Analogies should not be stretched beyond their permissible limits. While the intellect of the human being, the individualised understanding, is a part of the Universal or the *Mahat-tattva*, like the drop in the ocean, this analogy again is not complete. It is only a partial illustration. When we say the world is superimposed on the Absolute as a snake is superimposed on the rope, we do not mean that the Absolute is long like the rope. The aspect of the illustration here is only one of superimposition and not of all the other characteristics. The intellect is not exactly like the drop in the ocean, though it has some sort of a relationship with the *Mahat-atman* as the drop has with the ocean. While in quality the drop is the same as the ocean, the intellect is not in quality the same as the *Mahat-atman*. This is the difference. Otherwise, we would be small gods sitting in this hall. We are not that. We have something else in us, other than the element of the *Mahat-tattva*. While the *Mahat* is imbedded in our hearts, while the *Mahat-atman* is

the soul of our intellect itself, it is the background, the presupposition of all our thoughts and understanding. Yet, our understanding is not an exact fraction of the Universal Understanding. Our will is not a direct part of the Divine Will. It does not mean that if all the people would think together, they would think like God. Not so! Qualitatively we are inferior. This inferiority in quality is brought about by the illustration of reflection. We have what is known as the *avachheda-vada* and *pratibimba-vada* in Indian Philosophy. The individual is an *avachheda* and also a *pratibimba*. *Avachheda* means 'a limited part'. *Pratibimba* means 'a reflection'. While the drop is a *part* of the ocean, it is not a *reflection* of the ocean. It is an exact part of the ocean. Qualitatively it is identical with the ocean, though quantitatively smaller. But suppose you begin to see the reflection of the sun in several pots of water in a manifold way, you will not see in the reflection of the sun all the qualities of the original sun, though there is a refraction of light and luminosity present in the reflection. We have in us certain characteristics of the *Mahat-atman*, and yet we do not have all the characteristics of it. Because of the fact that we have some quality or characteristic of *Mahat-atman* in us, we are aspiring for it. If we had been totally cut off from it in every way, then, there would have been no longing for *moksha* or liberation. Something of the eternal speaks even in the mortal frame of our personality. Hence we struggle and writhe to get out of bondage. And a lot of effort is involved in it, the reason being that we are refracted, distorted, limited parts of the *Mahat-atman*—parts, no doubt, but reflected ones.

In the practice of yoga, therefore, we have to perform a double function—to enlarge ourselves in our *quantitative* make-up, and also deepen ourselves in our *qualitative* nature. We do not merely become wide in the perspective of knowledge, but also profound in the quality of our experience. There is a simultaneous movement of the soul outwardly and inwardly, in the practice of yoga. You become wide and also deep at the same time. It is not simply like plunging into the bottom of the ocean, which is merely going into the depths of it. It is also enlargement of the personality into the size of the ocean, gradually. The *pratyahara* process, the practice of *dharana* and *dhyana*, are not merely methods of the enlargement of the personality, but also the increase of the quality of our knowledge and power. Yoga changes us completely and makes us gold, as it were, out of the iron that we are. We become different in substance itself. There is a transfiguration of personality. We grow in every sense of the term. It is not like the growth of a baby into an adult, but like the growth of the plant into the animal, the animal into man, and so on, where there is a qualitative increase of knowledge and power. When the child becomes an adult, there is not much of a qualitative change in the species and the way of thinking of the individual. Man is man. He does not change. The human way of thinking does not alter merely because we have grown from childhood to the adult stage. But when one grows from the animal to man, there is a change of perspective and understanding and the way of thinking itself. The attitude to life changes. The practice of yoga is an evolutionary process and not merely a physical

growth or a quantitative expansion. "Evolution' is a very significant term. It is growth of a very novel type. It is a change in the very substance of what we are. It is a growth from humanity to Divinity. From world-consciousness we rise to God-consciousness, step by step. Just as we cannot have at present a clear concept of what God is, or the goal of life is, we cannot also have an idea as to what stages of yoga are ahead of us. We have only a slight inkling of what is immediately above us, and not of what is far beyond us. The identification of the intellect or the *jnana-atman* with the *Mahat-atman*, the union that is to be established through yoga between the individual understanding or *buddhi* and the Universal Intelligence, is constituted of many subtle inward conscious processes. From now onwards, yoga becomes a purely internal affair, a growth of consciousness, properly speaking, from its lowest involvement to the stages of its higher freedom.

DISCOURSE NO. 6

The most consequent and difficult part of yoga commences when we try to rise beyond the *vijnana-atman* or the intellectual personality. That stage whereby the human individual struggles to attune itself to the Universal is the hardest one in yoga. There are difficulties of various kinds in one's attempt on the path of Spirit, but these difficulties can be classified into two groups—the natural and the supernatural.

The natural difficulties are, to some extent, conceivable by the human mind, and these are those which we have to confront until we reach that level of concentration and meditation wherein the intellect reaches its limits. When the limit of the intellect is reached, we also reach the limit of our powers. Our capacities get exhausted. All that we had with us, we have already spent. The reserve forces have been employed and further effort is unthinkable. The human individual has its ultimate fortress in the power of the rational faculty, which the Upanishad calls the *vijnana-atman*, or simply *vijnana*. But how can the *vijnana* rise to the *Mahat-atman*? Here, ordinary human effort is not of much avail, because the very act of the entry of the individual into the Universal is equivalent to the cessation of all the possibilities of conceivable human effort. We have an idea of effort, which is always in terms of the organs or the limbs of the body and the senses of knowledge and action. Whenever we speak of effort of any kind, we always think in terms of the body and our individuality. But what is the kind of effort that we are supposed to put forth when our individuality begins to melt in the menstruum of the

Universal which we seek in the higher reaches of meditation? Here, it is not the mind that functions, not the intellect, not anything that we can think of normally in our life. Some unusual, unthinkable, supernormal element begins to operate. In one or two passages of the Chhandogya and the Brihadaranyaka Upanishads we are told that, during the passage of the soul to *Brahmaloka*, through the *Archiradi-Marga* or the Northern path, as they call it, a stage is reached when human effort ceases, and symbolically the Upanishad points out what happens to the soul when it cannot anymore put forth personal effort. Effort is possible only as long as there is consciousness of personality. When I exist, or you exist, or this or that exists, there is the chance of exertion in the relativistic or empirical sense. But a stage is reached, says the Upanishad, in the ascent of the soul, where it ceases to be an isolated individual. That is, it is no more a spark of light seeking access into the reality of the higher light. The Upanishad, metaphorically, tells us that a superhuman being comes and leads the soul from that point onwards, taking it by hand, as it were, to the higher destination. An *amanava purusha*, someone who is not a human being, comes there. No one has been able to make out who this superhuman being is. There are those who think it is the Guru that comes there in his supernormal personality. The relationship between the Guru and the disciple does not break with the body. Even if the Guru dies physically, or the disciple passes away from this physical world, the relationship between them does not cease, because the Guru-disciple relationship is not merely physical or social. It is a spiritual bond which persists till

the individuality melts into the Absolute. So it is opined by some that this superhuman *amanava purusha* is the Guru himself, who comes there taking the soul along the path that leads to the Absolute. Others think that it is God himself appearing in one form.

When the *vijnana-atman* tries to commune itself with the *Mahat-atman*, it does not have world-consciousness in the ordinary sense of the term. It does not see the world but it sees something else. This is the significance, perhaps, of what the Yoga Vasishtha calls *padartha-bhavana-tyaga*, one of the stages of knowledge or experience in spiritual life. In the language of the Yoga Vasishtha, *padartha-bhavana-tyaga* or *padartha-abhavana*, or to take it in another sense, *padartha-bhavana*, means the cognition of the substance of things. If we take the word as *padartha-bhavana*, we can interpret it as the cognition of the substantiality or the ultimate stuff of things, which begins at this stage. If we take it as *padartha-abhavana*, or *padartha-bhavana-tyaga*, it means the obliteration of the cognition of objectivity. This happens when the *vijnana-purusha*, the individual centre, communes itself with the *Mahat*. What happens? What takes you to the *Mahat*? Not your effort. But what else? Words fail, the mind gets hushed in its function, language becomes abortive and a new kind of silence prevails when one tries to comprehend what this mystery is. A pull is exerted on the soul. What is this pull? We may say it is the gravitational pull of the Centre of the Universe. When a stone is thrown into the sky, it falls back on the surface of the earth on account of the pull of the earth. However forcefully you may throw the stone above, it will

come back to the earth by the force of gravitation. They also say that if you cross the gravitational barrier of the earth, there will not be any pull by the earth, but you will be pulled by some other planet, or star, or whatever there be, whose region the traveller in space may enter by chance. The pull of the earthly personality, the urge of individuality, the attraction towards objects it is that prevents us from going higher in our spiritual pursuit. Whatever be the strength and the power and the intensity of your meditation, you will see that the mind comes back to the earth. It will think of family, relations, office and many other earthly experiences. The individuality tries to have its say whatever be the attempt at a supersession of its calling or requisition. But by a chance, by a miracle, by the grace of God, if we try to overcome the urges of our personality, hard though it be to overcome them, we get into the gravitational region of the Universal. Then you are no more yourself. You are not a meditator, or a *sadhaka*, or a seeker. You appear to be *nothing*, because you are trying to become *everything*. The *Mahat-atman* takes you into its fold. You become a citizen of a different region of reality, altogether. A government of another type of existence will protect you and take charge of you. The Constitution of the Universe of the *Mahat-tattva* will govern the operations and the needs of the individual that has gained entry into that realm. Everything will be done of its own accord, and there is no need to do anything else there. All things spontaneously happen there. They are not done by any individual or person. We cannot use the word *doing*, or *working*, in that realm, because the doer himself ceases to be there. When

the agent of action melts, gradually, like camphor exhausting itself by burning, the meditation with which our effort began ceases, and the individuality begins to evaporate. It gets consumed in the Fire of the Universal, and here effort becomes a part of the Universal Process. Action is absorbed into the Law of Being and everything becomes an operation of the Eternal. Eternity begins to work inexorably, and the seeker, the meditator, has nothing to say, and nothing to do there. May we add, to our own surprise and shock, that the Force exerted by that gravitational pull of the Universal is much more than any power that one can think of in this world. Not all the powers put together in the world can equal a jot of that Force. It is the Force that attracts the Universe towards itself. How does God pull the world towards Himself? Aristotle, the famous Greek philosopher, says in one place that the world is moved by God as the heart of the lover is moved by the beloved. It is an action which is no action. It is a movement which cannot be called movement. It is an event which is other than any temporal happening. Eternity working is unthinkable, inconceivable, because according to us, all working is temporal movement—but there is a kind of action which is Eternity keeping vigil. The power of the Eternal is not the power of the body, not the power of the elements, not a force which moves in the direction of objects, but is a power that becomes self-conscious. It is *shakti* that is identical with the *shakta*. That is the nature of *Mahat*, and when the *vijnana-atman* enters this realm, it sees a new light altogether, an entirely novel, sunlit day of Eternity. Eternal day prevails there, says the Chhandogya

Upanishad—*Sakrid vibhato hi brahmalokah*. It does not mean that this sun of ours shines there. This sun does not shine there, nor the moon, nor the stars or this fire, says the Katha Upanishad. That One shines eternally, as if in perpetual day—That which illumines even the glorious light of the sun. That is the abode of *Mahat-tattva* which the *vijnana-atman* enters. Universality consumes particularity. You begin to be a member of the whole Universe. Every corner of Creation receives you with hospitality. Everything in the world begins to smile at you with a satisfaction of the deepest order. Wherever you go, you receive hospitality, kindness, sympathy and a loving goodness. Everyone begins to feel that you are his own or her own. Stones will melt and trees will bend before you. This is what happened in the case of Suka Maharshi. Such is the experience of that master *yogin* who is blessed or is fortunate enough to gain entry into the *Mahat-tattva*. 'God-man' is not the word that we can call him with. He is something more. You cannot explain what it is.

But is it all? The Upanishad goes still further. We become giddy even when we think of the *Mahat*. Is there something more than that? Yes, there is. Well! The mind cannot think. It is better it does not think. The Upanishad goes on, taking us above the *Mahat*.

tad yacchec shānta-ātmani

There is something more than Universality. What could it be? If the mind is to contemplate it, the heart would give way, the brain would cease to function. Every cell of the body will melt, and it is this condition, indescribable,

inscrutable, that made saints and sages dance in ecstasy. You must have heard of Mira dancing, Tukaram dancing—all these saints danced. And why did they? They were not crazy people. It was the bursting experience of a supernatural delight that entered them. They could not explain it. They could not express it in words. They could not even contain it within themselves. It could be expressed only in an ecstasy of a supernormal behaviour. The individual is invaded by the Absolute.

The *Shanta-atman* is the Peace that prevails when even the Universality of the *Mahat* becomes an inadequate experience. It is inadequate because the notion of a universe subtly persists even in the *Mahat*. In the language of the yoga of Patanjali, we may compare it to the last verge of *savikalpa* or *sabija samadhi*, where a vestige of the Universal experience persists, but it is not perception of the universe. What happens to the soul beyond the fifth stage of Knowledge, no one can say. These are merely language and words for us, which will convey no sense, practically speaking. But something exists beyond the *Mahat*. There is something beyond the Universal also. What could it be? The Katha Upanishad tells us:

astīti bruvato'nyatra kathaṁ tad upalabhyate.

How can one say anything about it except that *it is*? It is not the Universal, it is not *Virat*, it is not *Hiranyagarbha*, it is not *Ishvara*. How can one attain it except by accepting that it simply *is*. It was St. Augustine who said that it can only be called 'That which is'. Nothing else, nothing more, nothing less; and centuries before Augustine was born, the

Katha Upanishad had already said it—*asti, astitva*. Not even *asmita*, Self-consciousness, can explain the nature of Truth.

In the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad, we are told that the Creative Will felt, 'I am', '*Aham asmi*'. But Pure Being is something beyond the state of '*Aham asmi*'. It is *Kevala-astitva*—Absolute Existence. '*Tathata*' is the term used for it in Buddhist philosophy. They also call it *Bhutatathata*—'Thatness' or 'Suchness'. These are the attempts of language to express the inexpressible. *Bhutatathata* or *Astitva, Kevalata*, or *Be-ness* as they put it in English, is the *Shanta-atman* which is experienced, realised as the Inner Soul of even the Universal *Mahat*.

The yoga that is the means to this realisation, if we can call it a means, is as difficult to comprehend as the goal itself. Gaudapada, in his Karika, says it is *asparsa* yoga. It is not yoga in the sense of union or contact of one thing with another. Generally we define yoga as union. Here, in this Experience-Whole, one thing does not become another thing. As a matter of fact, one thing cannot become another thing. Everything maintains its own substantiality. It is not *sparsa* yoga or the yoga of contact or union, but *asparsa* yoga or the yoga of non-contact. As a baby cries in fear when it is placed in an atmosphere where it can see nothing outside, not because it is afraid of anything that it sees, but because it does not see anything, the soul trembles, shivers, quakes and is taken aback when it gains entry into That wherein it cannot see anything external. It cannot contact anything. Do you know what you will feel when you are absolutely alone? Something more indescribable and

miraculous than this takes place here, where the soul perceives nothing outside it, because it begins to get absorbed into *That which it sees*.

This is also described in one of the *sutras* of Patanjali, where he says that the meditating consciousness slowly gets tinged with the nature of the object, and the object gets tinged with the nature of the subject. The objects in the world begin to speak to you in their own language, by recognising you: "My dear friend, you have come!" The mask which covers the objects is lifted. The world is no more a stranger to you. The world begins to speak to you as your dear and near friend, kith and kin of the family to which you belong. Originally you belonged to it, but now you have forgotten it.

In this union of the soul, which cannot be called a literal union of one thing with another thing, where the subject melts into the object, and vice versa, what yoga can be practised? Here the Upanishad alone is our guide. The yoga of the Upanishad is a masterly technique of soul-transformation. In various places they give us indications, hints of what this yoga could be. The Upanishad yoga is not the ordinary yoga that we usually study in our yoga institutions of the world. It is the yoga which can be practised only by the soul, not even by the mind and the intellect. It is soul contemplating itself as its goal. In this yoga, what does the soul do? How does it recognise its goal? It is the perception of the Self of all things that is the yoga of the Upanishad.

The world will not lose you and you will not anymore lose the world. You will not be a stranger in this world and

the world will not be anymore a stranger to you. You will not be denied anything by the world, and you will not deny anything to the world. The object, the world outside, the things that you see with your sensory functions, all assume a new character altogether, which could not be discovered or detected earlier. We can never dream that the objects have any quality or character which is akin to our own nature. There, in the stage of the contemplation of the Universal where the *vijnana-atman* rises to the *Mahat* and the *Shanta-atman*, the objects lift the covering which has been hiding them upto this time, and you see what it is in front of you. In this meditation, you do not see the objectivity of things. A tree is not a tree, a stone is not a stone, a mountain is not a mountain, the world is not the world. In this yoga of meditation, according to the Upanishad, you rise into a state of consternation when the objects begin to seem as those in whose company you once lived. The universe is not anymore a field where you live as a content thereof, but it becomes a part of your nature, a part of your very skin itself so that when you think, everything will begin to think; when you breathe, everything will start breathing.

In the Chhandogya Upanishad, there is an anecdote of Raikva, the sage, who used to sit under a cart, scratching his body as a person with no work whatsoever, known to nobody in the world, a great master of yoga. There was a king called Janasruti in that country, who was also a *yogin* and a master. The Upanishad tells us that two birds were flying across in the sky and Janasruti was on the ground on some mission of his, and one of the birds said to the other,

"Don't cross him, don't cross him. Don't you know it is Janasruti, the sage who will burn us if we cross over his head?" The other bird retorted, "Who is this Janasruti, about whom you are speaking, as if he is Raikva, the sage?" This conversation between the two birds was heard by Janasruti, the king, who was also a great sage. "Oh! look at it! They are speaking about me in this manner!" "Who is this Janasruti as if he is Raikva?" The birds went on: "All the virtuous and good deeds that anyone performs are credited to the account of Raikva. If anyone does any good thing, it goes to his credit." What is this? Suppose you all people start earning salary, and it is all credited to my account, what is the good of your working? But this is what happens—whatever wonderful things, good things, beautiful things, glorious things or valuable things or signficant things exist in the world, all these belong to such a person of Knowledge. The whole world converges towards that personality which practises that yoga of 'That which is', says the Chhandogya Upanishad:

yatheha kshudhita balah mataram paryupasate;
evam sarvani bhutani agnihotram upasate.

As hungry children sit around their mother asking for bread, cringing for a little food from the mother, loving her, jumping on her lap, so does the world cringe for you, crave for you, come round you, sit on your lap, fall at your feet, when you realise this Stupendous Reality. This is what will happen to you when you practise this yoga of the communion of the *vijnana* with the *Mahat* and the absorption of the *Mahat* into the *Shanta-atman*.

The Upanishad gives us this wonderful message, the glorious message of eternity to all mankind, enough to fill us all with unbounded joy for all times to come. But the Upanishad is also cautious in giving us sufficient advice of a motherly character, when we tread the path. It is the path of the sword, the path of the razor's edge—*kshurasya dhara*. Who will try to walk on the edge of a sword? But this is the path of true yoga. The tests you have to pass through, the various disciplines one has to undergo before this yoga becomes successful, are indeed difficult to explain. The whole body, the mind and the senses have to be chastened simultaneously. How this is done is also hinted at towards the end of the third chapter of the Bhagavadgita, where we are told that it is only with the strength and the power and the grace of the Atman that the senses and the mind can be controlled—*buddheh param buddva.*

In the Gita, immediately preceding these verses, we have the advice given that the senses have to be controlled. But how can the senses be controlled? Who is to control the senses? We are wedded to the senses in such a way that we have no power over them. We work in terms of the senses, according to their demands and their interpretation of the nature of things. How can we exert any kind of pressure on the senses without utilisation of a higher power? Morality, truly speaking, is the interpretation of the lower in terms of the higher. This is the principle of all ethics. All success depends upon the extent to which we can utilise the resources of the higher when we deal with a lower principle. Unless we draw sustenance from the higher forces for our progress in the path of yoga, let alone in our efforts in the

ordinary activities of life, there would be the least chance of success. Where God is forgotten, success is far to seek. Everything is done by the Absolute, Universal Ishvara, God Himself. All actions are His actions. He hears through the ears, sees through the eyes, speaks through the tongues of all beings. Our sight, our hearing, our taste, our action, our thought, our intellection, our very existence, is His existence and His action.

When this yoga takes possession of us, the world takes care of us. We are no more in poverty, we are no more in fear, we have no more any kind of insecurity around us. We are well guarded by the police of the whole cosmos. The Yogavasishtha has this comforting message for us all. The guardians of the quarters themselves begin to take care of us. Why should we worry about our daily meal? It is a pittance and a poor thing to think of. You shall be filled with the ambrosia of the Eternal. Everything will be supplied to you in the proper manner, at the proper time, to your fullest satisfaction. These implications and consequences naturally follow from the practice of this majestic yoga.

DISCOURSE NO. 7

The problem of the Katha Upanishad may be regarded as what pertains to the enigma of life and death. The great question of life is also the great question of death. While life is a great mystery before us, death stares at us as a still greater mystery. Both these sides of the same coin of experience stand before us as an eternal query which sages and saints from time immemorial have been trying to confront and solve to the satisfaction of each individual seeker.

The Katha Upanishad is given to us by the Lord of Death in the context of the aspiration of Nachiketas who sought for eternal life. It is death that leads to life, as it were. ‘Die to live’, is the main theme of one of the songs of His Holiness Sri Swami Sivanandaji Maharaj. Unless you die to the self, you cannot live the life eternal. Unless you be reborn and be as children, you cannot enter the gates of heaven, said the Christ. All great men think alike. The Upanishad, which is given by Yama, the Lord of Death, is an attempt at the solution of a central mystery which is before us on one side as life in this world and on the other side as life hereafter. We make a distinction between the here and the hereafter. We are accustomed to differentiate between life and death. For us they are two different things altogether, without similarity of character. That is why we love life and dread death. The worst punishment that can be meted out to a person is to hang him, execute him or kill him. Nothing can be more miserable than the contemplation of impending death. Horror identified with experience is death itself, while life, we believe, is a flow of

nectarine experience. Why is it that we fear death and love life? Because we neither know life nor death. Children's love for toys has no rationality behind it, though there is a good psychology which explains it. Our loves and hatreds are childish reactions to immediate stimuli from outside, and we need not take too seriously what our untutored mind speaks in the language of its own poor experience. The Upanishad is not here before us to pamper our urges in terms of sensory gratification. The Upanishad is the secret of life. The very word 'Upanishad' means a secret teaching of the innermost essence of existence. We hear that the Upanishad is the quintessence of the Vedas. While the Veda is knowledge, the Upanishad is the essence of knowledge. While knowledge may pertain to an object, the wisdom of the Upanishad is that which pertains to the eternal Subject, the ultimate Reality behind things. Such being the context and the content of the Upanishads in general, and of the Katha Upanishad in particular, it would do well for us to examine for a while the meaning that seems to be implied in the question of Nachiketas and the answer of the Lord of Death, Yama. What was it that Nachiketas wanted or asked for, and what was it that Yama bestowed upon him? What was the question and what was the answer? The question, evidently, was a very comprehensive encounter of human experience. It related to all levels of human knowledge—sensory, psychological and spiritual. The three fasts, the three questions, the three boons may be said to be relevant to the three kinds or levels of experience through which we pass as souls or individuals. Sense, reason and intuition; perception,

cognition and experience; the senses, the mind and the Spirit, are the fundamental stages of experience. The questions of Nachiketas pertain to these levels of the quest of the human soul; and the answers given by Yama, the boons bestowed upon Nachiketas, are precisely the counterpart of these questions, the Universal answering the individual, God speaking to man, the Absolute entering into the relative, to solve the problems and the questions of life and death.

What is death? To us humans, mortal beings tethered to the experience of the body and the senses, death is the annihilation of all values. That is why we fear death. It is a negation of everything we hold as dear and near. All our pleasures are cut off. Our existence itself seems to be denied. It appears as if we are not going to be recognised any more. Everything is done for. All things are over. It is finished. That is death for us. But death itself is here the Teacher. If death were a negation of all things, you would learn no lesson from it. The greatest teacher of life is death itself. Life is the student, death is the tutor. We have a beautiful incident narrated by Kalidasa in his *Raghuvamsa*. There was a king called Aja, the father of Dasaratha. He had a very dear consort called Indumati. She died mysteriously by an accident, which was a death-like shock to the mind of king Aja. He wept and beat his breast, and cried before his Guru, Vasishtha. "Mighty sage! What a calamity has befallen me!" Vasishtha speaks very few words, and in the answer he gives to Aja, he says, "What is natural is death; it is life that is unnatural." That we are alive is a mystery. That we die is not a marvel. That we are able to breathe is a

wonder by itself. That we are subject to death is the naturalness of our personality. The whole of the Universe is death manifest, says Buddha, the great seer of our own historical times. The universe is death, as it were, because it is a procession of transitions, a movement, a perpetual transformation of constituents. Do you call it life?

Death becomes the teacher when we get awakened to the fact of this procession of the transitoriness of everything. The question of Nachiketas was not concerning the quest of the personality of the human being. He was not so ignorant as to put the simple question: what happens to the individual soul after the shedding of the physical body. We have already made reference to the fact that the death which Nachiketas referred to in his question was of a different kind altogether. Empirically speaking, death and life have no ultimate dissimilarity between themselves. There is a continuity between life and death and between death and life. While experience passes into a different structure of its own constitution, the structural distinction between the previous experience and the subsequent one causes an oblivion in the consciousness of the empirical ego in respect of the past experience, and the connection of this very same consciousness with the subsequent experience makes it feel that it is born into a world and a new type of life, while nothing essentially different has happened to it. It has only forgotten a past experience and become alive to a new type of experience. Death is a forgetfulness which overpowers the individual under a given set of circumstances—these circumstances being, as pointed out, the structural difference between one set of experiences and

another set that immediately follows it. This is why we do not remember our past lives. We are completely ignorant of what we were before we are born to this physical world and to this physical body. This forgetfulness is due to the fact that consciousness gets tied down to the structure of a particular bodily individuality, to a certain extent of intensity, that it is severed from the previous set of experiences and the bodily individuality to which it was connected earlier, and the very same thing will happen once again. The experiences will repeat themselves when this body will be shed. The shedding of the body is to our individual consciousness a negation of itself, as it were. The consciousness of our body is our consciousness as far as our practical experience is concerned, and when the body is cast off there is a shock injected into our nerves. The body, the nerves and the mind are connected to one another. Death becomes a shock on account of the unexpectedness of the experience and one's unpreparedness for it. Everything that is unexpected comes to us as a surprise. If it is expected, it would not be so painful. If we are to know that there is an earthquake going to take place in a few minutes and we are going to die just now, and if the intimation is given to us a few minutes before, we would not be so much unhappy about it as when it comes suddenly and takes us unawares. We never expect death. We know that it will come to us any time; yet there is a mist hanging before our consciousness. On account of this illusion the consciousness gets fastened to the bodily individuality, conforms itself to the bodily experiences alone, forgets the past and becomes unconcerned about the future. We are not bothered about

what will happen to us after death. We are not aware of what happened to us in the past. We are concerned only with what this body is at present, what relations there are with this body at this moment of time, in this present life of ours. This is the worst type of ignorance in which one can be shrouded.

But death and life are not fundamentally isolated experiences. When memory persists, we call it sleep. When memory vanishes, we call it death; or, from another point of view, we call it death which is an experience of a new form of bodily individuality, all this being brought about by the desires of the mind of the individual, the desires being endless. We die because of desires, and we are reborn on account of desires. Desires are propulsions of our individual nature towards certain types of experience. These propulsions, which we call desires, demand contact with certain groups of physical objects. All this dramatic effort on the part of the mind to come in contact with certain sets of physical objects goes by the name of life; and the type of the physical body into which one is born, and the kind of relationship of society with which one is connected in this life—all these are determined by the particular set or group of desires with which one is born, this set being called the *prarabdha-karma*. That which we usually call the *prarabdha* is nothing but the power or the force of those kinds of desires which have not been fulfilled in our previous lives, but which have to be fulfilled in this present empirical life of the bodily individuality. When these desires are exhausted by experience through this particular given bodily individuality, the body is shed.

Death is, therefore, due to the exhaustion of the momentum of that set of desires which we call the *prarabdha*, and which cannot anymore work out their function through this particular body. When a particular part is played by a dramatic personality, and the enactment is over, there is an exit of that personality. Because its function is over, one is no more concerned with that personality, and the screen drops. The body that is given to us, our present individuality with which we are born, is a vehicle for experience by the mind in terms of those groups of desires which have not been fulfilled in the past but which can be fulfilled only in this empirical condition of the body. When the experience is over, when this set of desires gets exhausted by experiences, the body is dropped. So, death is a natural course of events in the process of evolution. Life and death mean one and the same thing, in fact, and the question of Nachiketas, and the answer of Yama in connection with this question, are not aspects standing apart, but form the obverse and the reverse of the same coin. What was the answer which Yama gave to Nachiketas? First, Nachiketas may return to the world of the mortals and shall be recognised and treated well by the people of the world when he goes back, which means to say that there can be life after death; otherwise, there could be no point in anyone's going back to the world. Second, rebirth need not necessarily be in this world. That is the answer concerning the *Vaishvanara-Agni-Vidya*, the experience of *Hiranyagarbha*, an experience of a higher world, rebirth into a realm which need not necessarily be of this physical world. While the first boon pertains to a

possibility of the return of the soul to this very same world, the second one relates to rebirth in a higher world. Rebirth is unavoidable, but it need not mean that one will be reborn only in this physical planet. Experiences are endless. The universe is not exhausted by the earthly experience alone. We are told that there are *lokas*, planes of existence or various possibilities of permutation and combination of the space-time-causal nexus. Fortunately for us, all that is corroborated by the modern physical theory of relativity, and the mathematics of modern times has merged itself in the philosophy of the Upanishads. That is wonderful. When we reach the apex of knowledge, we come to the same point. The relativity of experience is an explanation of the inner connection between life and death, but the ultimate meaning of death as well as of life, which is the meaning of the entire evolutionary process, is the Self-realisation of the cosmos. We live and die not because we want to live and die, merely. The purpose of life and death is not itself. It is a means to an end. The ultimate destination of the processes of life, as also of death, is the Self-recognition of all things. There is at present a self-alienation, as it were, of cosmical experience. The Self has become the 'other'. This is called creation. The creation of the Universe is nothing but the apparent alienation of Self-consciousness into an object. It is as if God becomes an object to his own Self. He sees Himself, as it were, in a mirror. He cognises Himself as an 'other'. The Subject becomes the object. Consciousness becomes matter, as the Absolute enters into the space-time-cause relation. The turning back of the effect into the cause, or the realisation of God as God, the return of

consciousness to its own Self, which is the ultimate naturality of things, is the purpose of the Universe. If the trees grow, the rivers flow and the sun shines; if we breathe, if the ant crawls, and the butterfly flies; if anything is what it is, it is because there is an urge from within each and every one to move towards a Universal Self-recognition.

So, life and death are a continuous process. They are not ends in themselves. And the three questions of Nachiketas, as well as the boons bestowed on him by Yama, pertain to the evolutionary process of the cosmos from sense to mind, from mind to Spirit; from objects to the internal conditioning factors of perception, and finally to the Absolute. Sense, mind and Spirit are the stages of the Katha Upanishad exposition. That is why we have here an explanation of the world of experience through the senses, as well as the world of pure thought, ending with the exposition of the nature of the Spirit. And the Spirit is the death of all things—*mrityur yasyo-pasechanam*. The Nasadiya Sukta of the Veda says that both death and immortality are shadows of the Eternal. Even immortality is a reflection cast by it. Life and death are relativistic counterparts of each other and they become a mystery, an enigma before us when we try to understand them with our intellect working in terms of sensory perception. The Spirit is the absorber of all things. It is the explanation of everything. There is a *vidya* in the Chhandogya Upanishad, called *Samvarga-vidya*, which means the 'Knowledge of the absorber of everything'. Objects are absorbed into the All-mind, which, again, is absorbed into the Supreme Spirit.

This is the philosophical and spiritual secret behind the sublime knowledge given to us in the Katha Upanishad.